History of Malayalam Literature

P. K. Parameswaran Nair

SAHITYA AKADEMI
NEW DELHI

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

This is a masterly survey, at once compact and comprehensive, scholarly and readable, of the origin and development of the language and literature of the people of Kerala. It was originally written in Malayalam by P. K. Parameswaran Nair and was published by the Sahitya Akademi in 1958 under the title *Malayala Sahitya Charitram*. It has since been reprinted twice. The present English translation has been prepared by E. M. J. Venniyoor, himself a scholar and writer of distinction.

The birth place of the Adi Sankaracharya, Kerala has been a vital centre of the development of Indian thought. Perhaps no other region in India has witnessed such a dynamic confluence of Dravidian and Sanskrit traditions, made more dynamic by the overflow of Christian influence from beyond the seas. No less remarkable is the clash of current ideologies and the super-abundance of radical experimentation with thought and form in the contemporary literary scene. And yet very little of this old heritage or present achievement is known to readers in other Indian languages, particularly of northern India. It is therefore hoped that this volume will help to fill this gap and will prove of as much interest to the general reader as to the student of comparative literature.

This volume is part of a series of Standard Histories of Indian Literature sponsored by the Sahitya Akademi to enable readers all over India to share in common the wealth and variety of Indian literature written in any language. For other volumes in the Series, already published or in press, please see the back flap.

Cloth bound Rs. 15.00
Paper bound Rs. 12.50

HISTORY OF MALAYALAM LITERATURE

HISTORY OF MALAYALAM LITERATURE

BY

P. K. PARAMESWARAN NAIR

Translated from the Malayalam by

E. M. J. VENNIYOOR

SAHITYA AKADEMI

NEW DELHI

First Published 1967

© Sahitya Akademi 1967

SAHITYA AKADEMI
Rabindra Bhavan
35 Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi-1

SAHITYA AKADEMI REGIONAL OFFICE
Rabindra Stadium
Block VB, Calcutta-29
15 Cathedral Gardens Road
Madras-34

894.8
P212h

Printed by P. K. Ghosh at Eastend Printers,
3 Dr Suresh Sarkar Road, Calcutta-14

PREFACE

I deem it an honour that I have been asked by the Sahitya Akademi to write this account of Malayalam Literature for their series of short histories of the important Indian languages. I must confess, however, that the actual writing of it has proved a more difficult task than I thought it would be. It is the need to be concise, and at the same time comprehensive, that proved particularly challenging. A history in some greater detail, I feel, could have made for a smoother, a more spontaneous, piece of narration. It is a vast subject, the history of Malayalam Literature from its earliest days up to the present time, and when it has to be presented in a volume of this size, even the most important material has got to be condensed drastically. At the same time, it is necessary to discuss even relatively unimportant factors which went into its shaping. Every major poet and author, and all the movements they enriched, have to be presented in their proper sequence and perspective, and the social circumstances of the times in which they flourished interpreted and evaluated in terms of the present-day situation. Needless to say, to synthesise and coordinate the various factors has been no easy task, and the author had no models to go by, either.

However, I have sought to make this work as comprehensive, within the framework of the series, as possible. It is the idea of the Sahitya Akademi to bring out, through this series, the correspondences and similarities among the various regional languages and the unity that underlies Indian Literature as a whole. It is also their idea to translate the work into other Indian languages. It has therefore become necessary to conceive this work from a wider perspective and leave out certain details which may not interest non-Malayali readers.

It has been my idea not to make the work a catalogue of names. In fact there is no relevance in a work of this kind to speak of authors whose works have no direct bearing on the growth of literature. But this choice of names becomes a real problem when we come to the modern period. While dis-

cussing a movement, many names may have to be mentioned, but it is hardly possible to discuss them all. I can only say that if some names are left out, the omission is in no way else deliberate. I may also add that if a few well-known works, published since the preparation of the manuscript, have been left out, that too was inevitable.

I acknowledge with thanks the very considerate assistance rendered to me by the Malayalam Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi in the preparation of this work. Sardar K. M. Panikkar, President of the Board, Professor Joseph Mundasseri, Sri Suranad Kunjan Pillai, Sri G. Sankara Kurup, Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair and Sri N. V. Krishnawarier have all gone through the manuscript and helped me with their valuable suggestions. The discussions I have had with Sri Suranad Kunjan Pillai were particularly useful. I am also indebted to Dr. K. M. George, Assistant Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi. As a linguist and critic, he has been of even greater help to me than as an official of the Akademi. We have had to correspond with each other at great length, and his suggestions have had much to do with giving the work its final shape. Once again I thank these distinguished men of letters and the Sahitya Akademi for their very kind help and guidance.

Trivandrum
7-2-1958

P. K. PARAMESWARAN NAIR

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The original of the present work, *Malayala Sahitya Charitram*, first published in 1958 and reprinted twice since, carries the story of Malayalam Literature up to the year 1956. Much has happened in the language since then and it may be hoped that in course of time when the contemporary trends have been stabilized, a new edition of the work will cover fresh ground.

A translation of this kind entails certain limitations, and these by and large are typical of translations made from any Indian language into English. There is hardly anything in common between Malayalam and English from a linguistic or literary point of view as there is, say, between Malayalam and Tamil which belong to the same family, and the transference of thought-patterns and imageries from the former into the latter entails considerable stretching and recasting. This is more so in the case of poetry—and the present work contains quite a lot of it. It is inevitable that in this process of transference much of the music, rhythm, nuances and emotive overtones which mean so much in a piece of literature are lost, and the passage as translated may sound flat, if not odd and unpoetic. Indeed the damage is considerable in languages like Malayalam which rely so much on indigenous musical metres for the overall poetic effect. For instance, a *pada* from Kathakali or a boat-song like the *Kuchelavruttam* can hardly preserve its beauty, even its identity, except in its original setting.

We have some well-known instances wherein the translator substitutes a music of his own—and this may be in keeping with the idiom and the diction of English—to make up for the loss sustained by the original. But it seems to the present translator that this approach can hardly convey the feel of the original, especially in a history which involves considerations other than the purely literary. On the other hand, it seems preferable to make the translation as close, and even literal, as possible so that at least the thought-patterns, and possibly even the linguistic features of the original, could be conveyed to the extent possible.

Yet another difficulty is with the plural meanings of expres-

sions which add so much to the charm of the original passages, especially in classical poetry. An instance is given on page 91 but with expressions like *chennayo?* on page 97 there is nothing that the translator could do.

Again, a Malayali knows what a Kathakali or a Tullal is, and the author can proceed on the assumption that he knows its technical and literary associations. But this would not do in a version made for non-Malayalis. The translator has supplemented the original text with a few more details wherever necessary, but even so, for a proper appreciation of such portions the reader may have to stretch his imagination a little.

The question was carefully considered if diacritical marks should be used in the printing of names and titles, but the idea was finally given up as the book is meant primarily for a popular readership. The index is prepared in the usual alphabetical order with the surname or the last part of the name as the basis, but this arrangement is apt to prove occasionally wanting as in names with more than two parts. For instance a name like Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer is given under Iyer, but the part of the name most frequently used in the text is Ullur. This, again, is unavoidable.

The translator is grateful to Sri P. K. Parameswaran Nair, author of the original work, for the very profitable discussions he had had with him, and to the authorities of the Sahitya Akademi for their help and guidance. He is also obliged to Sri Manjeri S. Isvaran who had very kindly gone through the text and made valuable suggestions.

All India Radio
Trivandrum
1-11-1966

E. M. J. Venniyoor

CONTENTS

	PREFACE	v
	TRANSLATOR'S NOTE	vii
I	THE LANGUAGE: ITS ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION	1
II	EARLY MALAYALAM LITERATURE	12
III	MANIPRAVALA: THE EARLY PHASE	26
IV	THE OLD SONGS	38
V	MANIPRAVALA: THE LATER PHASE	55
VI	DEVOTIONAL AND DIDACTIC POETRY	63
VII	EARLY PROSE LITERATURE	79
VIII	KATHAKALI LITERATURE	86
IX	POETS OF THE PEOPLE	102
X	MALAYALAM AND ENGLISH	115
XI	THE NOVEL	122
XII	THE SHORT STORY	140
XIII	THE DRAMA	149
XIV	RENAISSANCE IN POETRY	164
XV	THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT	174
XVI	THE GOLDEN AGE OF ROMANTIC POETRY: ASAN	182
XVII	VALLATHOL	198
XVIII	ULLUR	213
XIX	ROMANTIC POETRY—AFTER ASAN AND VALLATHOL	223
XX	G. SANKARA KURUP	232
XXI	CHANGAMPUZHA AND AFTER	239
XXII	PROSE LITERATURE	256
XXIII	TRANSLATIONS	277
XXIV	LITERARY AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS	284
	APPENDIX	289
	INDEX	291

CHAPTER I

THE LANGUAGE: ITS ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

1. *Major Epochs in the History of Kerala*

Kerala is an ancient land with a history of many centuries. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata refer to it, though incidentally; Megasthanes, the Seleucid ambassador who came to India in the fourth century B.C. speaks of the land and also of its king; and the Asokan edicts emphasise its status as a premier kingdom of the peninsula. The first major epoch in its history of which we have adequate data, however, is that of the Cheras who held court at Tiruvanchikkulam in the early centuries of the Christian era. It was, for aught we know, an epoch of great achievements in a people's collective life. And to bear testimony to the prowess of that dynasty we have the Chentamil classics of the age, notably *Patitruppattu*, *Chilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai*.

It needs no substantiation that Kerala held a pre-eminent position in respect of foreign trade since the earliest days in known history. All the important civilisations of the ancient world, such as Egypt, Arabia, Babylon, Rome and China, maintained close commercial contacts with its shores, and the teakwood, sandalwood, spices and peacock feathers exported from its ports were highly priced in all the foreign markets, in Egypt and Rome especially.[1] How intimate those immemorial ties had been is fully borne out by the Roman coins dug up from various parts of Kerala in recent years.

There is reason to believe that even in the heyday of the Chera dynasty the power exercised by the monarchy was in no way absolute. The institution of *nattukkuttam* or the village assembly had taken such firm roots in the soil by then and for

[1] There are historians who hold the view that the reference in the Old Testament of the Bible to the ships of Solomon çarrying ivory, peacocks, monkeys, etc. from foreign lands into Egyptian ports relates to the commercial intercourse that that part of the world had with Malabar. They point out that there is no evidence to any other part of the world trading in ivory and peacock feathers in those remote times.

ages been playing such a pivotal role in the collective life of the people that to dispense with them or even curb their power was no easy task for the central authority. Nor would a ruler prefer to undermine the traditional polity, for the service each unit rendered him in dispensing administrative responsibilities over its jurisdiction was more than adequate compensation for any restraining influence it might exercise over his doings. The decline of the Chera dynasty facilitated their further expansion in power and prestige, and it is presumed on the strength of circumstantial data that the entire administrative machinery remained their exclusive responsibility for quite a long period of time.

Thus the polity that obtained in Kerala following the Chera epoch was essentially democratic in principle. The principal agents of the people who sat in the *nattukkuttam* and carried out governmental functions were the Nambutiris (Brahmin immigrants who made Kerala their home) and the chiefs of the autochthonous Naga population. The largest administrative unit into which the land was divided was the *kazhakam* and under the *kazhakam* were the smaller units like the *gramam*, the *desam* and the *koottam*. It was quite an ingenious system; however, it could not endure for long because of the corruptions which set in on its fabric as time went by. The alternative that the inhabitants tried was a system of vicegerency, vesting administrative powers in princes brought down from the neighbouring house of the Pandyas from time to time. The Perumals, as these viceroys were known, conformed to the laws of their office for some decades but, as it often happens in history, the ultimate result of the system was hereditary monarchy. We do not know much about their doings nor how the people reacted to their regime, but we know that the dynasty came to an end with the overthrowing of Bhaskara Ravi Varma by the Chola king Rajendra Chola. (A.D. 1041-1044).

There had been in Kerala, even before the advent of the Perumals, a great many chieftains and princes governing vast regions subject only to the hegemony of the central authority. Now that the central authority was removed, they saw no reason why the land should not be split up into principalities, each assuming absolute power over his domain, and thus were

born the kingdoms of Kolattunad, Calicut, Valluvanad, Cochin, Odanad and Venad. The process of division continued over the centuries, and the main chapters in the later history of Kerala concern the destinies of these little kingdoms, their mutual wars and the fortunes of their rulers.

The appearance of the West at this stage marks the next major phase. Led by Vasco da Gama the Portuguese landed at Calicut in 1498 A.D., and close on their heels came the Dutch. The prime concern of these foreigners was trade, but they could so manipulate the course of events, playing one prince against the other, that in a short while their influence was felt in the internal affairs of certain parts of the country. Towards the close of the seventeenth century the political map of Kerala consisted mainly of three kingdoms: Venad or Travancore in the south, Calicut in the north, and Cochin in between. The arrival of the British caused further changes in the political set-up: all the kingdoms in the north including the territory of the Zamorin of Calicut passed into their hands and Travancore and Cochin were left to continue as what were then called Native States.

The attainment of independence initiated the move towards the political integration of Kerala. In 1949, the Travancore and Cochin States were welded into one unit, the Travancore-Cochin State; and, on the first of November 1956, on the implementation of the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission, a Kerala State, comprising the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State (barring the four Tamil-speaking taluks of the South and Shencottah in the East), the entire Malabar District and the Kasargod taluk of South Kanara, was created. In the Kerala State thus brought into being, ninety-five per cent of the people speak Malayalam, the total population in 1956 being 13.6 millions.

The sense of solidarity that pervaded Kerala during the reigns of the Cheras and Perumals and was manifest in her polity continued to be an ideal even after its break-up into tiny principalities. Indeed the goal that every king, who sought to stabilise his power in Kerala, set before him was the Kerala of Cheraman Perumal.[1] There had always been a deep-rooted

[1] A great name in Kerala's dynastic traditions.

awareness among the people that the land is one and indivisible. The sentiment evidently had its moorings in a common language and a common culture and is best expressed in festivals like Onam, Vishu and Tiruvatira, in the customs and manners of the people, in their temple festivals, entertainments, art-forms, ceremonies and even in superstitions—all of which conform to an identical pattern throughout the length and breadth of the land. The efflorescence of this spirit kept pace with the evolution of her arts and her literature and eventually had its culmination in *Aikya Kerala*, that is, One Kerala.

2. *The Genesis of 'Malayalam'*

The term 'Malayalam' as referring to the language of Kerala is of comparatively recent origin. To begin with it denoted the land itself. It is probable that the term is the resultant of a combination of two words, *mala* meaning mountain and *alam* meaning the land or locality (which lies alongside the mountain). Subsequently the synonyms *Malayanma* and *Malayayma* came into being as denoting the language of the Malayalam country and finally the name of the land itself was taken over as the name of its language.

Evidently Malayalam belongs to the Dravidian family of languages, but there is considerable difference of opinion about the exact nature of its relationship with the other languages of the stock, with Tamil in particular towards which it bears the closest affinity. Quite a few scholars are of the opinion that Malayalam is but an offshoot of Tamil, or rather, a daughter. This view, first held by Bishop Caldwell, has since been elaborated and substantiated by a well-known grammarian of Kerala, A. R. Raja Raja Varma. The intimacy that subsisted between the two languages all through the centuries, the identity that the grammars and vocabularies of both the languages evince, and the old practice of using the term 'Tamil' as a synonym for Malayalam have all lent considerable support to this theory. But in the light of the increasing application of scientific methodologies in the assessment of affinities between languages and the comparative studies since carried out in respect of the two languages, this theory would seem to require further examination.

3. *Malayalam and Tamil*

It is not between Tamil and Malayalam alone that we find affinities in respect of grammar, syntax and vocabulary, we find the same in respect of all the languages of the stock: Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu. In Ramakrishnayya's *Dictionary of Dravidian Cognates*, published by the University of Madras, we have a list of about five thousand words in regular currency in all the four languages and in Tulu.[1] It need hardly be argued that this identity does not indicate that one of these languages gave birth to the rest, but that all of them came into being from out of one original language and developed on parallel, but independent, lines. If the affinity between Malayalam and Tamil is more pronounced, the reason must be sought for elsewhere—in the unbroken continuity of their contacts, historical and regional—and not in a parent-child relationship.

Philologists do not seem to have any well-defined difference of opinion over the view that the present Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada and Telugu and the dialects of Coorg and Tulu had for a common source an original Dravidian that had currency over the entire peninsula at some prehistoric time. The diversity of geographical features and sociological tendencies must have provided the stimulus for its ramification in different directions and for the evolution of the new shoots on separate lines. In the case of Malayalam and Tamil, the Western Ghats was an effective dividing line, and during the early formative years when social and political intercourse between the two regions was meagre they took on their individual forms independent of each other. During the later centuries, however, political and administrative intercourse between Kerala on the one hand and the Cholas and the Pandyas on the other, became more intimate, and this eventually led to Tamil assuming the more dominant role. It was thus that Chentamil, as the literary form of classical Tamil is called, was accepted for centuries as the medium of royal proclamations, documents and even of literary expression in Kerala. The influence was a powerful one, no doubt, but it was not so profound as to alter in any radical manner

[1] Dr. Chelanattu Achyuta Menon, *Pradakshinam*.

the characteristics that Malayalam inherited from the original Dravidian and preserved in the speech of the common people. The same, however, was not the case with Pandit-tamil, the common tongue spoken to the east of the Western Ghats; Chentamil altered its form and texture to such a degree that it shed many of its basic characteristics with the passage of time. Viewed from this angle, say some philologists, Malayalam stands in closer relationship to the original Dravidian than even present-day Tamil.

The following illustrations can be cited in support of this theory: while Tamil shows *ai* endings, Malayalam preserves the original *a*; the predicate in the Tamil syntax has accepted suffixes indicative of gender and number—for example, *avan vantan* (he came), *aval vantal* (she came), *avar poyar* (they went), etc., while the original form which does not allow of such endings continues to be in use in Malayalam; *chuttezhuthus* or adjectival forms such as *a* (that) and *i* (this) are seldom used in Tamil save in poetry, whereas the same are in common use in spoken and written Malayalam; innumerable words found in the original Dravidian are found in Malayalam also, while the same are no longer extant in Tamil: for example, *tellu* (a little), *nin* (yours), *ayi* (over), etc; the same is the case in regard to the phonetical values of characters such as *ta* (as in tat). Apparently these facts have to be taken as indicative of a definite intimacy between Malayalam and the original Dravidian and the distinct individuality it has maintained since very early times. Etymologists also point out that many usages of immemorial origin, found no longer in Tamil but continue to be current in Malayalam, conform to the canons laid down by Tolkkappiyar, the earliest of Tamil grammarians. Similarly, many words taken over from the original Dravidian and proved to have been in use at one time in Tamil by such works associated with Kerala as *Patitruppattu* and *Chilappatikaram* are still in common currency in Kerala whereas their meaning can hardly be made out in the Tamil country without the help of a lexicon. The following are but a few examples: *tunnalkaran* (tailor), *peetika* (shop), *angati* (market), *aliyan* (brother-in-law), *pattayam* (granary), *itu* (weight), *toni* (boat), *pani* (arm), *pava* (doll), *pulari* (dawn).

4. *The Distinctness of Malayalam*

From the foregoing account one fact emerges unmistakably clear: Malayalam had an existence of its own, independent of and different from Tamil since the earliest days in known history. The two had their origin in a common stock and they branched off in two different directions. While Tamil underwent transformations resulting in Chentamil, the reformed classical form, and the same altered the original features of the common tongue spoken to the east of the Ghats, Malayalam did not register any such fundamental change. Yet due to historical reasons and geographical contiguity, Malayalam had to accept a good many words and usages from beyond the Sahyas. Thus, even though it may seem at first sight that there is a deep-rooted affinity between the two, there is no valid reason to suppose that one is the offspring of the other. It would indeed be unscientific to suppose so just because there are parallel sounds in both.

Yet another reason that contributed to fostering such a view was the old practice of using the term 'Tamil' to denote the language of the Malayalam country. Of course the term in its present connotation was never used as referring to Malayalam, but to describe it as *Malanattu Tamil* was enough to perpetuate the impression that one is but a different version of the other. That the term in this context is only a suffix indicative of the common stock from which all the South Indian languages sprang would be evident when we note that Canarese was once called *Karinattu Tamil* and Tulu, *Tulunattu Tamil*. But in the case of Malayalam there was this difference, that the suffix continued to be in use in Kerala long after it was given up in other parts of the peninsula. It offers, incidentally, an explanation for the paradox in regard to the old practice of describing works written in the chastest Malayalam as works in Tamil.

5. *Provincialisms and Dialects*

As in the case of all living tongues there have been, since early times, provincialisms in the use of Malayalam. The variations can be classed mainly under two heads: *tekkan* (southern) and *vadakkan* (northern). This division is based

obviously on the geographical distribution of the variations, but it has to be mentioned that no hard and fast boundary can be set for any one form. Perhaps if we divide the land further into South Travancore, North Travancore, Cochin, South Malabar and North Malabar, we might be able to form a fairer idea of their distribution. If any one provincialism assumes pronounced features, then we might as well call it a dialect. In Malayalam, however, there is hardly any that warrants such a description. We can only say that the language, as spoken in places to the north of Calicut, in Tellicherry and Chirakkal for instance, in the Laccadive and Minicoy Islands of the Arabian Sea and in South Travancore, knows considerable variations.

Class and communal differences also have given rise to peculiarities in the use of the language. The supposition is that the Nambutiris, the Kshatriyas, the Intermediary castes, and Nairs, all of whom have had the privilege to education since early times, speak a purer form of Malayalam in comparison to that of the so-called low castes—the Pulayas, the Pariahs and other classes who live by manual labour. The traditional notion that manual labour is derogatory contributed to their severance from the rest of the society and this, in turn, led to their developing a separate idiom. Tribal people who inhabit jungles far removed from the villages constitute another group with its own distinctive linguistic peculiarities. The language spoken by tribes like the Vedas, the Kanikkars and the Malankuravas is evidently primitive. Yet another instance of sociological factors giving rise to differences in idiom, and in this case, thanks to contacts with Arabs also, is the Malayalam of the Moplahs, the Muslims of Malabar. A general tendency initiated by modern education, to which every class has access, is the elimination of all provincialisms which leads naturally to a standardisation of the language. But it has to be mentioned that so far there has not been any appreciable change as regards the spoken language.

6. *The Malayalam Alphabet*

At present Malayalam has a script of its own, but in the early centuries it used a form called the *vattezhuthu* which had

currency all over the regions of the Cheras and the Pandyas. It disappeared from the rest of the peninsula by about the fifteenth century, but in Kerala it continued to be in use for three more centuries. Documents, letters, books and inscriptions were mostly written in this script, and even after giving it up, children first initiated into the study of the language were required to learn the *vattezhuthu* characters also, besides those of Malayalam and Tamil.

From the *vattezhuthu* was derived another script called the *kolezhuthu*. It is said that the *ezhuthu* or writing was done with a *kol*, a stick, and hence the name *kolezhuthu* for the script. There is no fundamental difference between the two scripts except that in *kolezhuthu* there are no specific symbols for endings in *u* and for *a* and *o*. This script was more commonly used in the Cochin and Malabar areas than in Travancore. Yet another script derived from the *vattezhuthu* was the *Malayanma*, which was in common use to the south of Trivandrum. *Malayanma* also does not differ fundamentally from the *vattezhuthu*.

With three scripts in current use the writing and reading of Malayalam must indeed have been a difficult affair. *Vattezhuthu* was perhaps the better form, for it had currency all over Kerala and did not have any regional variations. But the absence of character combinations, the vowels *a* and *o* and conventions for symbols were real difficulties. The trouble with *kolezhuthu* was still more considerable, for it knew regional variations also. And in the case of *Malayanma*, the complexity of the script, Tamil usages and conventional abbreviations for words were handicaps which made it unintelligible to the rest of the region. It is likely that in course of time these difficulties contributed to their disappearance and brought in the *grandhalipi* which is the basis of the present script.[1]

It is held that *grandhalipi*—the term literally means 'book-script'—was in use all over South India since the seventh century A.D. The advent of Manipravala literature[2] must have been the major factor that paved the way for its introduction in Kerala. It altered the pattern of the script then in use as time went by and by the nineteenth century when the alpha-

[1] See Appendix.

[2] Malayalam literature with a generous admixture of the vocabulary of Sanskrit. See Chapter III.

bet was more or less stabilised, it came to be recognised as one of the scripts of Kerala with *arya ezhuthu* for a synonym.

According to Dr. Burnell, the eminent philologist, all the scripts obtaining in South India are derived from what are called Cave Characters. The script used in the Asokan inscriptions of the South is, according to him, a modified form of the original Cave Characters. He presumes further that even though there are certain differences between the *vattezhuthu* current all over the peninsula at one time and the script of the Asokan edicts, both are derived from one common stock, a Mediterranean script. This view, which is based largely on the similarities that these South Indian scripts bear towards Arabic and Phoenecian scripts, gains in historical probability when we remember that Indian merchants had contacts with Babylon since about 1000 B.C. The *brahmi*, says Burnell, is the first script that Indian philologists fashioned out of the foreign characters.

Of the fourteen important languages mentioned in the Constitution of India, Malayalam takes the eighth place in respect of the population to which it is the mother-tongue. And of the South Indian languages it ranks as the fourth, there being, according to the Census of 1951, 32.9 million Telugus, 27 million Tamils, 14.4 million Kannadigas and 13.3 million Malayalis.

7. *Literary Periods*

Hardly does any unanimity exist among scholars in their division into periods of the history of Malayalam literature. A good many of them have chosen to divide it into the Ancient, the Mediaeval and the Modern Periods, the linguistic features of the corresponding epochs being the sole criterion. But works which do not conform to the pattern of the language which is taken to be the standard at any specified epoch have been written during all these periods so much so that such a division would necessarily tend to be arbitrary. A more satisfactory division which would not only facilitate our narrative but also conform to the general trend of the evolutionary forces which shaped the literature would be the following: the Ancient, the Modern and the Contemporary.

After the branching off of Malayalam from the original Dravidian and its assumption of an independent form, it developed rapidly into a literary language, first under the influence of Chentamil and subsequently, of Sanskrit. The literature of this period, which is considerable, falls mainly under two heads: *Pattu*, that is to say, the song or the ballad; and the *Manipravala* or literature which had for its medium a hybrid language created out of blending Malayalam with Sanskrit. This period extends from the tenth to the fifteenth century.

In the works of Cherusseri, the fifteenth century poet, we have the first symptoms of a new style, but, for the unmistakable stamp of modernism, we have to turn to Ezhuthachan who flourished in the next century. And although, occasionally, from the point of view of theme and treatment, the imprint of a mediaeval temperament is discernible in him, yet, in regard to vocabulary, syntax and the general style, his poetry is essentially modern. It has also to be mentioned that poets who follow what may be called the 'Ezhuthachan Style' are not rare even today.

The advent of English ushers in the Contemporary period in the history of Malayalam literature. The interest that Malayalis, in common with the rest of the country, evinced in the culture and literature of the British since their coming into power in the last century, resulted in far-reaching consequences for the literature of Kerala. Western literary patterns, both prose and poetry, were adopted with such enthusiasm that in a short while Malayalam came to have its *khanda kavyam* or shorter poems, the *bhavagitam* or the lyric, the short story, the novel, the modern drama, the essay and all such forms known to modern literature. Printing, publishing and journalism are also largely the outcome of this impact with the West.

CHAPTER II

EARLY MALAYALAM LITERATURE

1. *Chants, Proverbs, Riddles*

We do not know what the features of the earliest writings in Malayalam were, for we have no data in this regard. We can only presume that such simple compositions as the hymn, the ballad and the folk-song which usually characterise the formative periods of all languages must have obtained in Kerala also. It is possible, however, to gain some insight into the linguistic and literary lineaments of those non-extant compositions in the light of the subsequent *tottams* or chants, ballads and folk-songs which, as would be natural to expect, are composed in the unadorned language of the common people. The *tottams* will be particularly helpful in the context as, being sacramental, the possibility of major variations in their text or style is remote. The excerpt given below, a eulogy on the goddess Kali, reflects virtually the mood that inspired the chants:

> Clenching the dagger
> and swirling the sabre and lance,
> in full battle array,
> with bloody entrails streaming
> like garlands from the neck,
> and eyes darkly rolling...

Proverbs and riddles preserve and suggest some of the basic qualities of the old language. They are, as a rule, maximed versions of the common tongue and as such involve an element of the inventive, but the salient point to note is that the idiom is unmistakably native, free from the imprint of both Tamil and Sanskrit which have influenced the subsequent evolution of Malayalam. The following specimens still extant may serve to bear out the primordial features of the language and throw some light on the social, occupational, martial and domestic life of the early community:

Kadakkal nanachale talaykal podikku.
(Water the root for buds at the top)

Akkara nilkumpol ikkara pacha
(This side is greener when seen from the opposite)

Uri nellu uran poyittu pathu para nellu panni tinnu.
(While out to gather *uri* paddy, the pig ate up full ten *paras*).[1]

Ari nazhikkum aduppu moonnu venam
(Be it one *nazhi* of rice, the hearth stones must number three).

Arayan chattal padayilla.
(The fighting ceases when the king dies).

Riddles also preserve the basic features of Malayalam:

Ana kera mala, adu kera mala
Ayiram kantari poottirangi
(The hill elephant can't climb, the hill goat can't climb, a thousand chillies came flowering down).[2]

Pinnale vannavan munnale poyi
(The last to come, the first to leave).[3]

Kattil kidannavan koottayi vannu
(He who lay in the forest came for a companion)[4]

2. *Kerala and Chentamil Literature*

It is not known if there were works of any considerable literary merit in early Malayalam, but we know for certain that there was no dearth of poetic talent in Kerala. The works of the age which due to historical reasons were composed in Chentamil—the language of the royalty and nobility—speak volumes for the eminence of its many poets. The house of the Cheras, too, was an enlightened one, and the kings were

[1] The term *uri*, *para* and *nazhi* are from the indigenous system of measures. Two *uris* make one *nazhi*, forty *nazhis* one *para*.
[2] Stars.
[3] Tooth.
[4] Walking stick.

generous to a fault in their encouragement of Chentamil. For instance, *Patitruppattu*, a poetic saga glorifying ten generations of the Chera dynasty, tells us in every canto of it, of towns, villages, gold and precious stones being endowed to poets by their royal patrons. The kings themselves were men of letters and the contributions they made to classical literature are indeed invaluable. The most famous name in their annals, as also perhaps in the entire range of Chentamil poetry, is Ilango Adigal, brother of the king Chenkuttuvan who flourished in the second century A.D.

Chilappatikaram on which rests Ilango's fame is an epic extolling the glory of womanhood. Accused of stealing an anklet Kovalan is put to death by the king of Madura. But Kannaki, his wife, a paragon of every womanly virtue, would not take her widowhood lying. She proves to the king her husband's innocence and exposes the culprit, an avaricious goldsmith. Nemesis overtakes the king on the miscarriage of justice and he dies of a broken heart; and Kannaki, in her uncontrollable wrath and grief, curses the city, which is instantly consumed by flames. Wandering along the banks of the Vaigai river she arrives at last on top of a mountain, and there, under divine circumstances, joins her husband in celestial bliss. Events of the last canto are laid in the Chera capital of Tiruvanchikkulam, the modern Kodungallur (Cranganore) in Central Kerala, and hence, appropriately enough, it bears the title *Vanchi Kandam*. The episode is the building of a temple for Kannaki in his capital by Chenkuttuvan who, listening to her story, becomes her ardent devotee. The stamp of Kerala is discernible in *Chilappatikaram* in other respects also. Commentators draw attention to the countless usages in the work which exemplify what is called the *Malanattu Vazhakkam*, the style followed in Malanad or Kerala. According to *Patitruppattu*, the poets and scholars who flourished in Madura left the city on its destruction and sought patronage under Chenkuttuvan at Tiruvanchikkulam. The more important names among those who migrated to Kerala were Kulavaniyar, Chattanar, Paranar and Kapilar. Besides the *Patitruppattu*, they composed some of the other well-known works in Chentamil like *Manimekalai*, *Akananuru* and *Purananuru*.

Chera kings of the later centuries too have made substantial

contributions to Chentamil. Thus the well-known classic *Venpamala* is the work of one Ayyanaritanar of the seventh century. Of the sixty-three Nayanars, the Saivite mystics who flourished in South India between the seventh and ninth centuries, two hailed from Kerala—Viranmandi Nayanar of Chengannur and Cheraman Perumal Nayanar, a reigning prince. The hymns of the latter—he is extolled as having had a direct *darsan* of Lord Siva—are indeed the spontaneous effusions of an ardent devotee. There were many other mystics and poets in the Chera line of whom Venattu Adigal of the tenth century A.D. and Kulasekhara Alwar, both composers of devotional hymns, deserve special mention.

It would seem evident from the foregoing account that in the early centuries the major proportion of Kerala's poetic talent expressed itself in Chentamil. Because of this and, owing to the importance given to it in the administration of the kingdom, Malayalam did not receive the encouragement that was its due. It could, however, preserve its cardinal features unaffected by the official language, for it had already established its individuality. That this was so is argued out convincingly by the author of *Lilatilakam*, a fourteenth century treatise on poetics. He ordains that there should be no Tamil usages in Manipravala, that is, in the hybrid medium blended out of Malayalam and Sanskrit. After demonstrating with many illustrations the features which distinguish Malayalam from Tamil, he goes to the extent of asking if, in the earlier Manipravala works, one could find any trace of Tamil usages.[1] Inevitably it takes us to the conclusion that Malayalam had an existence of its own, independent of Tamil which was the language of administration and literary expression. *Lilatilakam* goes on to declare that being Dravidians, Keralites also are in a sense Tamils, but that languages have their inescapable differences. It states further that because certain sounds are identical in both the languages, a casual observer is apt to overlook their basic differences.[2]

[1] "There is not a trace of the Chola language anywhere in Manipravala" (Part I, page 16, Suranad Kunjan Pillai's Edition).

[2] "I have established that being Dravidians, Keralites are Tamils as well. But languages have their difference. The ignorant are apt to regard them as identical because certain words sound alike." Ibid, p. 13.

3. *The Advent of Sanskrit*

The influence that Sanskrit could wield over Malayalam is considerable and dates back to the earliest times. There is reason to believe that Sanskrit reached the Tamil country early enough, perhaps even before the evolution of the literary medium, Chentamil. But in Kerala there was a special reason for its more rapid infiltration: it was the immigration of the Nambutiris.

The Nambutiris, as the Brahmins of Kerala are known, came down to Kerala long before the beginning of the Christian era. We have the well-known legend that it was Parasurama, the Bhrigu warrior, who showed them the way. The immigration continued even after the transformation of the pioneer into a mythological figure, and in due course, the community was thoroughly acclimatised to conditions in Kerala. It has to be said that the Nambutiris were never a warlike race, that their intention was anything but conquest, that being a peace-loving people their sole desire was for a permanent home in the beautiful, fertile and hospitable land to the west of the Sahya Range. Nor would it have been easy for them, had they so intended, to drive out or enslave the native Nagas either, for in their cultural, social and martial attainments, they were in no way inferior to the newcomers. In the circumstances the Aryans must have deemed it more prudent to effect a miscegenation with the indigenous population, a complete identification with its social habits, language and other cultural peculiarities.

The Nagas reciprocated with equal goodwill and the outcome was the mutual exchange of most of their manners and customs. The scope and profundity of this cultural intercourse would be best explained when we note that the Nambutiris adopted the indigenous tongue for their own, wore *purvasikha* (tuft of hair over the forehead) after the manner of Keralites and imitated them even in their dress; and the Keralites, in their turn, accepted many of the features of Aryan civilisation including, notably, the learning of Sanskrit. And when the newcomers took wives also from the Nayar community—the term Nayar is deemed to have evolved from the original *Naga*—the merger became inextricably final. One noteworthy feature of this amalgamation is that the spread of

Aryan culture was in no way detrimental to the indigenous one. On the contrary, the new influence served as an effective impetus for the further enrichment of the ancient culture of Kerala. The practical wisdom and the spirit o fco-existence manifested by the Nambutiris contributed to the strengthening of this creative process and the miscegenation thus effected served to avoid all distasteful consequences to either side.

The important question is: How did the permeation of Aryan culture in Kerala react upon its language? Any vicissitude in the social structure would inevitably have its repercussion on the language of that society, and in this case it took the form of a steady flow of Sanskritic forms into Malayalam. The flow gained in depth and intensity in process of time and the subsequent course of the language and literature of Kerala has depended to a considerable degree on this literary communion.

4. *Kerala's Contribution to Sanskrit Literature*

When we consider the absorption of Sanskritic forms by Malayalam we would also have to take into account the role played by Sanskrit literature in Kerala both as a precursor to, and as a factor supplementing, that absorption and also the literature produced in the classical medium by its Malayali votaries. There is reason to believe that the atmosphere of Kerala braced the innate genius of the Nambutiris to such a degree that their output in the form of treatises on Vedanta, astrology, architecture and medicine and also in pure literature became phenomenal. The earliest of Kerala's contributions to Sanskrit now extant is put down to the fourth century A.D., but it can be surmised that the process might have begun much earlier. The names of Vararuchi, the mathematician, and of Mezhathol Agnihotri and Prabhakara, both exponents of the Purva Mimamsa, are but a few in the long and illustrious list of Keralites who enriched the Sanskritic lore. The crowning glory of this unique tradition, however, was Sri Sankara, the prophet of Advaita, who flourished sometime between the eighth and tenth centuries A.D. His works have a wide appeal all over India and, considering his contribution to the country's religious and philosophical heritage, one can only say

that it should be even so. However, it is doubtful if the full impact of his contribution and his influence as a living force in the cultural life of the people is felt with as much puissance elsewhere as in his own birthplace.

The poets who sustained this tradition are numerous. That some of the greatest names in the annals of Sanskrit literature were Keralites speaks much for their literary traditions: Kulasekhara who composed *Mukundamala*, Vasudeva, author of two *yamaka kavyas*, *Yudhishtira Vijayam* and *Nalodayam*, Saktibhadra who wrote the drama *Ascharyachudamani*, Tola, author *Mahodayacharitam*, Lakshmidasa, composer of *Sukasandesam* and Lilasuka who sang the *Sri Krishna Karnamrutam*.

5. *The Malayalam-Sanskrit Hybrid*

While Chentamil was encouraged by the Chera kings and Sanskrit was upheld by the Nambutiris, Malayalam, the spoken tongue of the common people, was left severely alone. If, therefore, the vernacular did not develop fast enough into a literary language, the reason must be sought for in the neglect it suffered at the hands of the higher-ups in society, the custodians of literature. But it had that innate vitality which, given the necessary incentive and patterns to emulate, could burst forth into a literary medium. And such an opportunity came at last when, with the increasing social intercourse with the Nambutiris, Sanskrit found its way into the life of the common people.

When the Aryans were naturalised as Malayalis and the Malayalis assimilated much of the Aryan culture, it became inevitable that Malayalam, now the mother-tongue of both the races, should undergo certain transformations. The mixing up of both the vocabularies in the give-and-take of daily life must have originated the process of this transformation. And gradually, a hybrid language was evolved, first perhaps for the exposition of religious, ritualistic and scientific theories, and subsequently as the spoken tongue of the literates in society. The sway that Tamil held over Kerala began to decline and, when Koothu and Koodiyattam, both dramatic art-forms, became the favourite entertainments of all the ranks in the community, the hybrid vocabulary gained much

popularity. The coalescence of the two languages went on over the centuries and eventually the resultant medium was put to literary purposes also. The first exercises in the new medium were the commentaries on Sanskrit works, for the rapid spread of Sanskritic learning necessitated them, and ultimately original works too came to be composed in it. And from this point begins the Manipravala epoch, one of the most fruitful periods in the history of Malayalam literature.

6. *Ramacharitam Pattu*

But before we take up Manipravala, another branch of literature which might well be deemed to have existed anterior to it claims our consideration. That also had the resultant of a coalescence of two languages for its medium—Malayalam and Tamil. Sanskrit words are also traceable in it, but their proportion is, on the whole, negligible. This is the poetic form called *pattu* which literally means song.

The author of *Lilatilakam* defines the *pattu* on the following lines: Its entire vocabulary should be such as can be written in the Tamil alphabet; the second letter of every foot must rhyme with the corresponding letter in the following feet; the first letter of the first half of the foot must be identical with the first letter of its second half; any metre may be adopted but not from Sanskrit. Though it is specified that only such words as can be written in the Tamil alphabet alone should be used, it does not necessarily preclude the adoption of words from Sanskrit. It only means that whenever Sanskritic vocabulary is availed of, as was often done, the poets should take care either to transform it in such a manner as can be accommodated within the Tamil alphabet, or more preferably, choose only those words which sound much like the rest. The law pertaining to metre is inviolable: it should invariably be from Tamil poetry. It would thus seem—and there are statements in *Lilatilakam* demonstrating it—that, on the whole, the *pattu* was conceived on the lines of Chentamil epic poetry.

The earliest of the *pattus* discovered so far is *Ramacharitam* which, according to the late Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer, an eminent poet and scholar of Kerala who published the first

thirty cantos of the work, was composed in the twelfth century A.D. He conjectures further in the light of internal and circumstantial evidence that its author was a prince, one Sri Vira Rama Varma who ruled Travancore from 1195 to 1208 A.D. But there are other scholars in Kerala, among them notably Attoor Krishna Pisharody, who hold the view that insofar as the linguistic features of the work are concerned it is not representative of Malayalam and that, most probably, it was composed by some South Travancore poet in the artificial, hybrid language spoken in that Tamil-speaking area. It is true that there is an element of artificiality about the language, but we have also to concede that at a time when Chentamil held sway it could not have been thought of as either odd or unnatural by the Malayalis.

The importance that the author of *Lilatilakam* attaches to the *pattu* and the quotations he provides to illustrate the same take us to the conclusion that there must have been many works like *Ramacharitam* in the North as well as in the South. In regard to the language of the *pattus* in general and of this poem in particular, it has to be inferred that it is a specially devised one, applicable to this branch of literary composition only. That it does not denote any particular epoch in the evolution of Malayalam would be evident from the fact that at the time these *pattus* came into being, other styles which depended exclusively on the vocabulary of Malayalam also were followed and that there are even *pattus* written in that style. It would thus be difficult to judge the age of a *pattu* by its linguistic characteristics, for its idiom, being a specially devised and conventional one, could be adopted any time. According to Dr. K. M. George who has done extensive research on the subject, the *pattu* and the Manipravala poetry, both composed in hybrid media, were invented and meant solely to meet the ends of literature; that is to say, they do not as such have any significant bearing on the pattern of Malayalam which obtained at the time of their composition.[1]

It would seem as though that the poet of *Ramacharitam* had in mind the soldiers of the land as his particular audience, for no other reason can apparently be attributed to his con-

[1] Dr. K. M. George, *Ramacharitam and the Study of Early Malayalam*, p. 81.

fining the theme to the *Yuddha Kanta* of the Ramayana. He follows Valmiki's version of the story to a considerable degree, but there are countless passages which bear amply the stamp of his originality. A thorough knowledge of the story of Rama, deeply felt emotions, picturesque imageries, euphonic arrangement of words replete with echoes and onomatopoeic effects and an all-pervading simplicity are the distinguishing features of *Ramacharitam*. All the demands of the *pattu* form of poetry such as the word-by-word rhyme, alliterations and metrical formalities are met with the utmost facility and, had it not been for the archaic vocabulary, it would have had a perennial popularity. It cannot, of course, be claimed that the author reaches the highest flights of poetic imagination, but the melody of his words and the harmony he spins out of his material can hardly fail to charm even those who do not understand the text fully. The work begins with the following invocation:

Ah, my Lord with lotus-eyes
Who beds Thy being on the breasts
of Lakshmi with the luxuriant hair
which wreathes of blossoms beautify!
Ah, the Be-all of all knowledge
to *yogins* ev'n unknowable,
search howsoever longingly
they might the *vedic* mysteries!
Ah, the strange illusory One
Who with a mountain balked the rains!
Grant me the muse to sing the tale
of Thy becoming a king to slay
in war the prince of *asuras*—
oh Lord, who takes the serpent-bed!

The pen-pictures strewn throughout the work have a lucidity and freshness seldom surpassed in old poetry. Here is one of them, a vision, as it were, of Sita bound on trial by fire, entering the presence of her lord:

Breasts of transcendent grace pressing,
the long blue eyes with tears brimming,

lotus-face bent and bosom hidden
in garlands and the figure wrapped
with arms and cloud-like hair and robes,
Janaki with flower-decked hair
and the blushful feminine speech,
adorned fully, and swaying soft
with gentle steps, approached the king,
and environed by celestial hosts,
stood on his left, illumining
the Universe.

Being a *pattu*, the music of which had thrilled generations of Keralites, *Ramacharitam* could affect rather deeply the course of subsequent poetry. Its linguistic traits and regional associations have been the subject of much research in assessing the evolutionary forces which led to the transformation of Malayalam into what it is today.

It is obvious that many *pattus* of the type of *Ramacharitam* were written both contemporaneously and subsequently, but it so happens that most of them are no longer extant. It is probable that its archaicism and the use of Manipravala relegated the *pattu* to the background as time passed and even its claim to be classed under literature was weakened by the imbecile productions of later periods. The few fragments unearthed so far are not only a far cry from *Ramacharitam* in respect of literary qualities, they do not even bear the stamp of Kerala. *Anchutampuran Pattu* and *Ulakudaya Perumal Pattu* are, for instance, composed in a dialect of Tamil which obtained in South Travancore. *Ramakatha Pattu* of Ayipilla Asan, however, has about it the true ring of poetry. It retells, like *Ramacharitam*, the tale of the Ramayana.

The aforesaid *pattus* do not suggest any appreciable change in respect of the evolution of the language since the days of *Ramacharitam*. But a radical change was coming over the language all the while, freed from the influence of Tamil and nurtured by Sanskrit it was moving fast towards the splendid Manipravala phase. The *pattus* of the later periods suggest the tendency, but it is in the works of the three Niranam poets that the unmistakable note of the new idiom is struck. These poets, whose works will be dealt with more adequately in

another chapter, flourished much earlier to the period of the composer of *Ramakatha Pattu*, but their style is more markedly akin to the Manipravala of the later centuries than to the contemporary *pattu* literature. They do conform to the canons in respect of the *pattu* except perhaps in regard to the specification about words being written in the Tamil alphabet, and contain many Tamil usages besides, but their idiom with its generous admixture of the Sanskritic vocabulary indicates a clean break with that of *Ramacharitam* and the other *Pattus*.

7. *Manipravala*

The circumstances which led to the emergence of Manipravala have been pointed out already. As the influence of Sanskrit waxed under its protagonists, the Nambutiris, and was eventually accepted as the medium of higher learning, it brought about profound changes in the vernacular of Kerala. The new words found their way into the spoken tongue and a compound of both the languages was freely used for puranic and philosophical expositions, for commentaries and debates at the seats of learning, at congregations of scholars and religious centres and even for declamations in the popular stage-shows. Hence it was but logical that the new medium should serve for literary expression also: men of letters who commanded mastery over both the languages drew freely from both the vocabularies for their compositions. A label was also devised to indicate the nature of the new medium, 'Manipravala'. A combination of two words, *mani* (pearl) and *pravalam* (coral)—which here denote Malayalam and Sanskrit respectively—the term derives its significance from the fact that just as the two precious stones are fairly identical in respect of lustre despite their difference in calibre, even so, Malayalam and Sanskrit which hail from two different families evince, when brought together, a real measure of homogeneity.

Manipravala is not a feature of Malayalam alone: there were similar epochs in the history of almost all the Dravidian languages. The only difference would seem to be that whereas it flowered into a great literature in Kerala, it did not do so in the rest of the region. There are different strains even under

the general category of Manipravala, but the differences among them are primarily one of degree, depending on the quantum of words taken from both the languages, and not of kind.

When Manipravala registered a bounteous growth, it became necessary that some rules should be formulated for its correct use. *Lilatilakam*, the treatise on poetics referred to earlier, supplied this need. It defines Manipravala simply as the coalescence of Malayalam and Sanskrit, and proceeds to explain that good Manipravala is that which appeals to men of taste. It is evident from the proportions prescribed for words of both the languages which go into the blending that the intention was just to enrich Malayalam with the Sanskritic vocabulary and not change its basic qualities. Certain features of Sanskrit grammar, those pertaining to inflections particularly, were occasionally availed of for ensuring harmony, but that did not affect the Malayalam syntax in any radical manner.

Lilatilakam enjoins that two conditions should invariably be observed in the handling of Manipravala: first, that the Malayalam words used should have the widest currency, even among illiterates, and secondly, that the Sanskrit words borrowed should be both familiar and simple. The intention is that such a medium would have an ideal homogeneity, thanks to similarities among its components, even as a string of pearl and coral shows homogeneity. The *uttama* or the noblest variety of Manipravala is that in which Malayalam vocabulary and *rasa* (aesthetic flavour) preponderate, the *madhyama* or the medium, in which both the elements are of equal proportion, and *adhama* or the low, in which Sanskrit dominates Malayalam and words stifle *rasa*. It is apparent from this classification that Malayalam was held to be the more important ingredient in the hybrid medium. The rule that the Sanskrit words borrowed should be both familiar and simple could easily have served as a pretext for bringing in a higher percentage of that vocabulary into the new medium, but in practice it was seldom so. Save in the later *champu* works whose authors were enamoured of the high-sounding Sanskrit phraseology, Manipravala was always of the *uttama* variety. The following remarks of the author of

Lilatilakam would be particularly appropriate in this context: "Thus a composition featuring identical words (of both the languages) should seem to be a composition in Malayalam and not one in Sanskrit. And that is the correct thing too."

It has also to be stated in this context that Manipravala is, in the final analysis, as much a symbol of the vicissitudes which came over the social structure of Kerala in the medieval ages as it is a literary medium.

CHAPTER III

MANIPRAVALA: THE EARLY PHASE

1. *The Temperament of the Age as Reflected in Manipravala*

It was the discovery, half a century ago, of *Lilatilakam* that provided for the first time a comprehensive view of the extent and uniqueness of Manipravala literature. The date of this work is still one of argument, but the view that it is a fifteenth century work holds a certain measure of unanimity among scholars. At any rate, it is evident from its range and comprehensiveness that Manipravala must have had a growth of four or five centuries before it could be written. The quotations it abounds in also substantiate this theory.

In later Manipravala we have a much higher percentage of Sanskrit words than in these fragments, and that would seem to imply that they are culled from works of an earlier period when Sanskrit was just getting acclimatised to Kerala. The variety of forms and themes handled by their anonymous authors is also instanced by these quotations: hymns on gods, eulogies on kings, *sthala mahatmyas* or the exposition of the puranic associations of places, portrayals of famous beauties, *sandesa kavyas* or messenger-poems, descriptions of festivals, romantic effusions, etc. It is indeed a pity that so far only an infinitesimal fraction of this old literature could be retrieved. The quotations provided in *Lilatilakam* are evidently taken from *sandesa kavyas* or are *vandanaslokas* (dedicative quatrains) of works of which practically very little is known. It is possible, however, to form some idea of the features of ancient Manipravala literature in the light of the few fragments we have come by—for instance, *Vaisika Tantram* and *Unnunili Sandesam.*

It may not be easy to specify another body of literature, not in Malayalam at any rate, which reflects so much the joy, the charm and the simplicity of life as does ancient Manipravala. The erotic, it is true, provides bulk of the grist to the poetic mill, but then we are not far wrong in supposing that the zest for life usually finds expression through the

erotic. At any rate, it is safe to venture that Manipravala literature is the product of one of the most romantic periods in the history of Kerala.

The one curious thing about the literature of this epoch is that not a trace of the life of the ordinary people is discernible in it. The view we gain even of the superior denizens in that feudal society is oblique and approximate. It may well be that a comprehensive view of life embracing all sections of the community and its ideals, its aspirations and questionings, its joys and miseries was not deemed as falling within the pale of poetry. To enchant the senses was all that the poets expected of their muse, and this they achieved with unsurpassing ability. The logical consequence of such an approach to poetry was the adoption of *sringara*, the erotic, as the main *rasa*. And indeed, every shade of it has been thoroughly analysed and paraded with an ineffable delight and confidence. The artistry that these poets are capable of is instanced by not only the delineation of the lovers whose beings, naturally enough, are taken up in striving for the fruition of their mutual love, but also of the atmosphere in which they move—an atmosphere charged with every charm that contributes to the heightening of their passions. The one nightmare they dread in their lives is separation, but they seem to be well aware that the bliss that reunion brings transcends even the choicest in heaven. The best of circumstances that Nature and man can provide is there as a backdrop to their longings—the cool moonlit nights of the fragrant spring, gorgeous mansions set amid blooming gardens, all kinds of fineries and every imaginable luxury, attending maids to carry messages and confidantes in whom to repose the secrets of love.

Almost all the extracts given in *Lilatilakam* are exquisite illustrations of poetry of an emotive character. Notwithstanding the tautology and the monotony that treatment of the same *rasa*, namely *sringara*, entails, the reader is drawn almost unawares to partake of the feelings that the poets could evoke and identify himself, not infrequently, with the character whose joys and woes are presented with such convincing sincerity. The music of the verse is as much a force that captivates the reader's sensibilities as its meaning and, divested of that music, it can at best only suggest the trend of the poet's

fancy. The following piece—a poet indulges in the memories of an embrace he had had from his beloved—however, might still be of help in forming some idea of the general pattern of old Manipravala poetry:

Am I deluged by ambrosial seas,
or extended over the full moon's pale?
Am I fast sinking in moonlit-lakes,
or in attar of roses immersed?
Ah no, an embrace! my dearest one,
beholding me in Kama's travails,
bequeaths on me in pity and love
an embrace so close and ravishing!

We have to conclude that most of the Manipravala works composed round about the time of *Lilatilakam* were devoted to portraying and eulogising the charms and excellences of heroines. The *champu*, another branch of Manipravala literature which derived from the *puranas*, had not then appeared on the literary scene. In the meanwhile the poets must have seen nothing better for the stuff of poetry than their own experiences, centred, as they are, round their inamoratas. At no time in the history of Malayalam literature, except perhaps the present, has poetry been so empirical. The women to whom the poets dedicated their muse were all living persons, either their paramours or at least their acquaintances. Occasionally, it so happened, the praises were composed at the behest of some prince who desired to gain the favours of a celebrated beauty. Despite the tautology that singing the same theme involves, these poems, on the whole, are less artificial than the later-day *champus*. *Unniyachi Charitam*, and *Unnichirutevi Charitam*—works which belong to this age and category—are thus distinguished by a certain measure of genuine feeling. The full text of none of these poems is available, but the fragments so far discovered are sufficient to throw light on their general features. The verse is in quatrains, but it is marked out from the later-day *kavyas* by the interspersion of a certain type of literary prose replete with rolling rhythms. These rhythms, it may be interesting to note, reappear after a lapse of much time, in the Tullal works of the

seventeenth century. The story element is largely fictitious and not infrequently woven round the love that some celestial being —a Gandharva or Indra or Chandra—bore for the human charmers. Yet the settings are realistic and provide occasionally some insight into the history of the times. It is apparent that the implication of celestial ones in affairs in Kerala is a contrivance of the poets to widen their canvas for painting the heroines in various situations and attitudes. Maybe, the Malayali beauties were irresistible even to the gods!

The feelings are genuine and the settings realistic, but the idiom often betrays efforts at ornamentation. It is ridden with too much of fancy and too many imageries and though instances of flights into the highest realms of poetic imagination are not rare, in describing the charms of natural phenomena especially, the bulk of it smacks of similar efforts in the Sanskrit *kavyas*. The one redeeming feature of these imageries, however, is that they bear the stamp of Kerala, both in respect of objects and the underlying sense of humour. For instance, the canopy that the poet of *Cheriyachi Varnanam* puts up in the autumnal skies for the coronation of god Kama as the lord of the realms of the heroine's charms is a *pandal* after the Kerala tradition:

> Behold the *pandal*, my dear friend,
> raised in the blue of the *sarat* skies
> spangled with pearls, the radiant stars,
> and the strip of a crescent to sway—
> to crown Kama with every glory
> lord of the realms of Cheriyachi's charms.

And for a metaphor to describe the rising moon, the poet would turn to the hand-ball game, a favourite pastime of Cheriyachi and the maidens of medieval Kerala:

> Raising her play-ball, the rising moon,
> striking with palms, the heaving sea-waves,
> her hair, the darkness of the night, swirling,
> and stars, her droplets of sweat, budding,
> eventide takes on Cheriyachi's guise
> (rapt, as she is, in the hand-ball game).

In portraying the physical charms of women and conjuring up the ecstasies of consummation and the pangs of separation, the heights attained by these poets have seldom been surpassed in Malayalam poetry. And with all its voluptuousness, old Manipravala has still a fascination for the discerning connoisseur.

It would seem as though for these poets life and Nature herself derived their significance from the presence in them of the goddesses of their adoration. If they love the panorama of Nature—the full moon and the bright stars, the fragrant flowers, the tender breeze and the heaving waves—it is just because they find in them intimations of the charms of their beloveds. They would even define her glories, the breeze in the following lines for instance, in terms of their love-life:

> Every breeze a breeze can't be:
> But ah, the one that from the country
> blows and o'ver its river swims,
> tender and cool, and dallies about
> the lush coconut palms,
> and caresses my love Rohini—
> her peerless, ravishing form—
> and then so kindly embraces me,
> with ecstasies to thrill me—
> well that, I say, is the real breeze!

Thus Nature and their sweethearts were, to the Manipravala poets, the two facets of life, and while revelling in amorous pursuits they had not forgotten to embellish their effusions with a rare aesthetic glow.

2. *Vaisika Tantram*, *Attaprakaram* and *Anantapura Varnanam*

Besides the aforesaid poems, erotic as they are in their themes, a few fragments of a didactic, theoretical or devotional nature have also been discovered recently. Of these the most important and representative are *Vaisika Tantram*, some *slokas* on the art of Koodiyattam, a few *stotras* and *sandesa kavyas*. *Vaisika Tantram* which is believed to have been composed in the eleventh century A.D. is a treatise on the art of

the courtesan. It is a curious theme, no doubt, and what is worse, is composed in the form of exhortations a mother gives her daughter on how to make the best out of a career as a *vesya*, but it has to be said for its poet that he could raise to the level of literature even passages which could easily have lapsed into exercises in obscenity. Nothing much is known about him, but apparently he was a man of sound common sense, well-versed with the ways of the world and principles of material success. Occasionally his poetry tends to become didactic and takes on the form of aphorisms:

> Presume not so, my dear girl,
> that any there are of no use
> to thee: for see, even the crow
> is needed once to feed upon
> the balls of rice we offer
> to the shades of departed ones.[1]
>
> Youth, my daughter, is too fleeting,
> of youthful ones, thou Kama's dart!—
> a flash of moonlight by the rains;
> and so the riches now amassed
> should serve to help thee ford the sea
> that lies ahead—the sea of age.

An important bearing that *Vaisika Tantram* has on the history of Malayalam is that it reads much like modern poetry despite its antiquity.

When Koodiyattam, the performance of Sanskrit dramas in temple premises by the Chakyar community, grew to be a popular entertainment, works laying down its principles became necessary. The need was soon met by experts and treatises which came to be known subsequently under titles like *attaprakaram* and *kramadipika* fixed the pattern for the rendering of the dramas adapted for Koodiyattam. Of those who reformed the art from time to time two names deserve

[1] The reference is to the Hindu ritual of *pitrupindam* performed by relations or the propitiation, peace and salvation of departed ones. The belief is that if the crow does not partake of the *pindam* offerings, usually cooked rice rolled into balls, the souls of the *pitrus* or elders are not pleased with the survivors.

special mention—Kulasekhara Varma and Bhaskara Ravi Varma, both royal patrons of the art. The reformation was biased in favour of incorporating more and more of the language of the common people, and this was realised through the *vidushaka*, the jester, who was not only permitted to speak in Malayalam but also crack jokes, usually parodies of the *slokas* and declamations of the hero, to entertain the audience. An indirect outcome of this latitude allowed to the *vidushaka* was the propagation of the Manipravala style; for the audience, the majority of which could not have understood Sanskrit, was given a clue to its vocabulary, thanks to the parodical and hermeneutic role played by its favourite. The *attaprakaras* and *kramadipikas* written at this period—the authorship of most of them is attributed to Tola, a court poet of Kulasekhara Varma—are largely in prose interspersed with poetry and contain a generous amalgam of the vocabulary of the ordinary folk. That this vocabulary is much the same today as it was at least eight centuries ago is evident from the treatise on Koodiyattam and the many parodies of Tola used by *vidushakas*.

The conversational idiom of the common people of those days, as exemplified by the following colloquy among women, was also a simple and direct one:

'Kali, take the bathing herbs.'
'Karur has no breast-cloth.'
'Tell me, where's the key, Nanga?'
'Well now, have you got ready
Chitta, the lacquer juice?'
'Listen, alas! my bangle is lost,
My only bangle, call the girl!'
'Pappi, is this the loin-cloth?'
'Kaduka, sweep and scrub the hall.'

The *attaprakaras* were written in Manipravala, but their tone was set by Malayalam. The proportion of Sanskrit words is very small and the Tamil usages negligible. The original of the following extract taken from an *attaprakaram* hardly gives the impression that it is a product of the Manipravala epoch in Malayalam poetry:

Hair that compares with dark blue clouds
pregnant with rain, and wreathes of flowers
whereon hum madly beetle throngs,
and forehead gleaming crescent-like,
and lips where glows the reigning red—
redder than flame-of-forest blooms—
and smiles surpassing the jasmine's white
in beauty, and the lotus-face
which turns to naught the full moon's pride
and arms, like garlands, long and round,
and breasts so glorious, which echo
the elephant's head in size and shape....

Anantapura Varnanam, a Manipravala work of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, is a devotional poem with *pundarikaksha puja* or worship of Vishnu (the god with the lotus-eyes) as He is enshrined in Anantapuram, that is Trivandrum, for its objective. The language conforms to the dictates of *Lilatilakam:* Malayalam provides the major part of the vocabulary. The descriptions are very realistic—an unusual feature in old poetry—and, instead of creating a city inhabited by celestial beings, it portrays one where common people live their day-to-day lives:

Sailor-merchants are walking the streets
with goods that came by the sailing crafts.
"Barter the paddy for rice," say some,
"betel for mangoes, not coconuts..."
. . . . . .
And then there are the fisher-women
swaying their bodies, heads and breasts
throwing forward and backward, and lost
to everything save the selling of fish,
talking and wrangling all the while;
and yonder lies the Kantalur fair
wealthy and bright, and in front of me
Rise three temples and Brahmin homes.

Stotras or devotional hymns constitute another significant branch of ancient Manipravala literature. *Lilatilakam* contains

many *muktakas*, devotional quatrains, taken either from works of an exclusively devotional character or from others which contain incidental ones. That the poets were not satisfied with just a string of the attributes of their gods or tributes to them, but embellished their compositions with fine poetic imageries, is a universal feature of the Manipravala *stotras*.

May the god of the cowherd tribe,
who, to the rhythms of anklets sweet,
dances on top of Kaliya's hood,
rapt in the nectareal melodies
of celestial nymphs who shed blossoms,
be my preserver for evermore!

3. *Sandesa Kavyas*

Sandesa Kavyas or messenger-poems have always held a pre-eminent position in the literature of Kerala. The number of poems produced in Kerala, in Sanskrit and in Malayalam, is so high that one is tempted to think that no other region has produced as many. The *Suka Sandesa* which, barring the *Megha Sandesa*, is perhaps the most outstanding messenger-poem in Sanskrit, was composed by a Keralite in the tenth century A.D. Some of the other important *kavyas* in Sanskrit —*Chataka Sandesa*, *Bhramara Sandesa* and *Kokila Sandesa* to name a few—were also composed in Kerala. The main reason for the popularity of this type of poetry among the Keralites would seem to be that their poets whose chief equipment was a fertile romantic imagination found in the *sandesa kavyas* the aptest poetic form to indulge their exuberant lyrical fancies. Thus the first phase in Manipravala literature was the golden age of the *sandesa kavya*, for it permitted free play for the romantic imagination as also for the erotic which is the dominant *rasa*. A good many *sandesa kavyas* are mentioned in *Lilatilakam*, but together with the mass of the old Manipravala poetry most of them are irretrievably lost to literature. And of the extant specimens, *Unnunili Sandesam*, the most important one, deserves special consideration.

Unnunili Sandesam is, by all standards, a first rate *kavya*, not only among works of its kind, but in all Manipravala litera-

ture. Nothing much is known about its author, nor when he flourished, but judged in the light of internal evidence, it is a fourteenth century composition in which the poet himself is the hero and the heroine, a young woman related, on the paternal side, to the Vadakkumkur royal family of Central Kerala. The separation of the lovers takes place one night in the hey-day of their connubial life: a jealous *yakshi* (fairy), enamoured of the hero's handsomeness, carries him off from their home in Kaduthuruthy where he lay in bed with his beloved, and flies southward to some mysterious destination. But when dawn breaks over Trivandrum, and the hero awakening from his slumber and realising his plight chants the *Narasimha mantra*, the lustful nymph, compelled by its power, drops him over the city and flies for dear life. The hero finds his way to the temple of the city and there, meeting his friend and classmate, Aditya Varma of the royal house of Quilon, entrusts with him his message of love.

It cannot, of course, be claimed for *Unnunili Sandesam* that it commands the breadth of vision or lyrical heights attained by the *Megha Sandesa*, but it has to be said that it belongs to the best of its category. The romantic temperament, so natural to Manipravala poets, reaches unprecedented pinnacles in this work, but its more salient feature is the realism that permeates through all its descriptions. The hero in the episode is not specified by name, but considering his reactions to the circumstances of the poem, the ease and confidence with which he identifies himself with them and the intimacy he could command with the prince, his messenger, there is reason to suppose that he was a Kshatriya youth of the royal house of Vadakkumkur. There is no apparent reason why the poet should suppress his identity, it might be because the poem does not provide him with an appropriate situation to disclose it.

Nothing that is relevant and beautiful in all that one can come across on the messenger's route from Trivandrum to Kaduthuruthy escapes the poet's fancy. The delight and reverence he feels in the presence of the manifestations of Nature impart to his descriptions a glow and sweetness seldom met with in similar poetry. Indeed there is no poem in the literary lore of medieval Kerala which reflects so much the scenic

splendour of the land and the joy of life that characterised the age. Groves clothed in vernal glories, with coconut palms, jack and mango trees and plantain herbs, footpaths lined with *ketakas* in full bloom and avenues canopied with infinite stretches of green foliage, the local beauties who flit like streaks of lighting across one's vision, homesteads wreathed in jasmines, chrysanthemums and *champakas*, patrician maidens singing in garden bowers and their lovers lurking beside them, the music of the koëls, the lispings of parrots and trumpet-crow of cocks, the rolling sound of the western sea, the fleets of fishing boats plying over the blue lagoons, teeming rice-fields and rivers and brooks meandering amidst them—the whole panorama of Kerala in all its multitudinous charms unfolds before our eyes as we accompany the messenger of *Unnunili Sandesam*.

Any poet could, of course, make a long list of the beautiful things in Nature (and that is what most often we get in *sandesa kavyas*) but a genius alone could transform, as with the touch of a magic wand, the raw realism of the whole into phenomena of an ethereal make. The poet of *Unnunili Sandesam* is such a genius, and the ability he evinces in blending realism with the highest flights of poetic fancy is indeed remarkable. And every quatrain is, with its rich shades of emotions and ideas evoked by choice words, an illustration of the *uttama* patterns in Manipravala. One gets a feel of Kerala's atmosphere from the very beginning and, as the *kavya* progresses with portrayals of the important places on the messenger's route, it gains in the sweep and depth of its imageries. The *slokas* have a jewel-like quality and are embellished with echoes, alliterations and onomatopoeic effects. Two of them are reproduced below—the first, a description of the dawn with which the *kavya* opens and the second, one of the countless vignettes scattered throughout the work:

> Like the trumpet of Kama, blown
> to mark his retreat, crowed the cock;
> the sun and moon were poised like
> the cymbals of the maid of dawn;
> the starry hosts were strewn about
> and turning pale, like flakes of maize;

and beetles rose like smoke from flames
from the hollows of lotus blooms.

May He, the sportive cowherd boy
effulgent in the cloud of dust
kicked up by hoofs of tramping cows
and hair arrayed in peacock plumes,
whose form is draped in golden robes
and fingers hold the goad and flute
and complexion blue, be enshrined
for ever in our inmost hearts!

The descriptions of Kaduthuruthy and the home of Unnunili, the heroine, in the second part of the *kavya*, are remarkable as much for their realism as for the romantic outpourings the poet is capable of. The scene brims with the longings of love and the pangs of separation, and the miraculous loveliness which pervades the whole soars into a crescendo worthy of the finale of such a composition.

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD SONGS

1. *The Works of the Kannassans*

It became inevitable with the progress of time that the *pattu*, with its canons dictated by Tamil poetry, should register some significant change in the face of the growing importance of Sanskrit literature. The rule that its vocabulary should be such as could be set in the alphabet of Tamil was the first to be violated, and its systematic Sanskritisation brought it more or less in line with Manipravala, the dominant literary medium of the day. But the composers of the *pattu* would not go all the way with the Manipravala poets; they clung to the puranic lore of the country for their themes, while their compatriots wallowed in the mire of their romantic imaginings. It is likely that they thought of themes bearing on contemporary society, especially those pertaining to the erotic life of man, as too imbecile for the high purpose of poetry; and in their search for something loftier and more substantial, which the times too warranted, they had recourse to the puranas which, naturally enough, furnished them with a high pinnacle from where to observe the world of men and things. There cannot be a nobler function for poetry, so they thought, than unfolding to the Malayalis the vast panorama of the puranas and the *itihasas* of India which epitomise all the higher strivings of man. And the result of such a conviction on their part was the enrichment of Malayalam with some of the noblest works on the themes of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata.

Of those composers of the *pattu* who took to the Manipravala style and left imperishable names in the annals of Malayalam literature, the Kannassans, known also as the Niranam poets, deserve specific reference. Three poets are known by this appellation—Madhava Panicker, Sankara Panicker and Rama Panicker—and in the light of evidence gathered from the works of the last named poet, we have to suppose that the first two were brothers and the third, their nephew. At any

rate, all of them belonged to the same family and took the name of Kannassan from a progenitor called Karunesan who, according to Rama Panicker, a grandson, 'was a *mahatma*, a great master and king of poets'.

The Kannassans flourished between the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth and lived partly at Niranam, a village in the Tiruvalla taluk of the Travancore area (whence the appellation Niranam poets), and partly at Malayinkizh in the south near Trivandrum. It is presumed that the reluctance of the Kannassans to have a complete break with Tamil, with the pattern set by *Rama-charitam*, despite their acceptance of the Manipravala style, was due to their association with the south where Tamil was still a force.

The more important among the works of the Kannassans are *Bhagavad Gita* of Madhava Panicker, *Bharatamala* of Sankara Panicker and *Ramayanam*, *Bharatam*, *Bhagavatam* and *Sivaratri Mahatmyam* of Rama Panicker. Madhava Panicker's translation of the Gita would seem to be the earliest in any Indian language. He had a perfect understanding of Sri Sankara's *bhashya* (commentary) on the Gita and could delve into the very fundamentals of the work so much so he could shorten the original with its 700 *slokas* into 328 couplets without omitting any important idea.

Sankara Panicker's *Bharatamala* is more a condensed version in Malayalam of the Mahabharata—and a highly imaginative one at that—than a translation of the original. His work seems to be the first major work in Malayalam based on the theme of this purana.

Pre-eminent among the Kannassans is Rama Panicker, the last of them, whose works excel those of the other two, not only in quantity but in their intrinsic literary merit as well. His version of the Ramayana is undoubtably one of the best works in Malayalam and, but for its language which has since become archaic and its metrical affinities with Tamil, it could easily have commanded a popularity comparable to the later work of Ezhuthachan. The prosodic and syntactic features of Malayalam took an altogether different turn immediately after the days of the Kannassans and hence their works would seem to us much older than those of Ezhuthachan who com-

posed in the next century. Yet, with all their archaicisms, the works of Rama Panicker, especially his Ramayana, cannot fail to fascinate the modern reader thanks to the spontaneity of its verse which is couched in a choice vocabulary, the loftiness of his thoughts and the charm and appropriateness of his imageries. There is a perennial freshness about his poetry, and that provides a more than adequate compensation for the difficulties inherent in unfamiliar metres and Tamil usages. The imprint of his genius is best borne by contexts wherein he deviates from the original of Valmiki, and such contexts are many. It takes Valmiki two or three *slokas* to describe the reactions which came over the audience when Rama broke the bow at Sita's *swayamvara*, but Panicker would not only abbreviate the whole episode in just four lines, but also embellish it with an apt simile:

> At that a good many kings trembled
> while Janaki danced with joy,
> even as the peacock would while listening
> to thunder, which the serpents frighten.

It may be mentioned in this context that the famous lines in which Ezhuthachan describes the event are but an adaptation of Kannassan:

> Listening to the thunder of the bow breaking
> the kings were seen like serpents shivering
> while peacock-like rejoiced Maithili.

Whatever be the *rasa*—love or compassion or heroism—Rama Panicker knew how best to evoke it with effortless ease. The following is from a description of Ravana's harem, of how it looked after its inmates had a surfeit of amatory pleasures in the company of their lord:

> Drunk with *madhu* in the company
> of the ten-faced one, and indulging
> proudly with him in amorous sports,
> and then tired and heavy with sleep,

in diverse poses the women lay,
with beetle-black tresses flowing free
and pastes and garlands falling away,
more beautiful than ever before.

And here is how the woe-begone image of Sita reacted on Hanuman as he saw her in the *asokavana* of Lanka:

Her hair by then had matted become,
and grieving sore on the earth she lay:
I saw her face, bedimmed with tears
flowing incessantly from her eyes
and mingling with dust: as when the sun
is seen through curtains of falling dew—
and ah, her sorrow!—and also like
a lamp oppressed by smoke, flickering.

Bhagavatam, *Bharatam* and *Sivaratri Mahatmyam* are also works of considerable literary merit, but not perhaps so outstanding as his Ramayana. It has to be said in conclusion that of all those who brought the literature of Kerala into closer contact with the literature and thought patterns of Sanskrit, the Kannassans, Rama Panicker especially, take the foremost place.

There were many imitators of the Kannassans, but only a few of their works could live to this day. It is likely that the poetry of Ezhuthachan contributed to the discarding of the Kannassan style, and when, with him, the language and literature of Malayalam moved in new directions, they had to brave the tide of oblivion. Yet the contributions of the Kannassans could, as indeed they ever will, survive the vicissitudes of time and taste thanks to their intrinsic literary worth and be ranked with the best productions of the Manipravala age.

2. *Folk Songs*

There is a sizable body of folk literature in Malayalam. Its authors, as elsewhere, were not men of any erudition, but simple souls who expressed their natural thoughts in spon-

taneous verse. Its output began long before the coming of Manipravala, and though a few of the words and techniques of the new medium found their way into it when Sanskrit gained wide currency, and the puranic lore too, the basic features of its language and literature remained unaltered and rooted to the soil of Kerala. The bulk of the old songs are no longer extant, but the few that have survived the centuries tell us much about the peasant life and the customs and manners of the different communities of olden times. Incidentally, folk literature was seldom a written literature, but transmitted orally from generation to generation.

The collection so far made comprises the following categories: *Krishi Pattus* (peasant songs), *Nhattu Pattus* (planting-the-seedling songs), *Pulluvan Pattus* (songs of the Pulluvas, folk priests of the serpent-gods), *Kuravar Pattus* (songs of the Kuravas, the indigenous gypsies), *Kalyana Pattus* (marriage songs), *Ona Pattus* (songs on Onam, the regional festival), *Panan Pattus* (songs of the Panas, the folk excorcists), *Tumbi Pattus* (dragon-fly songs), etc.

The songs of the *cherumas* and *cherumis*—the youths and maidens of castes like the Pulaya and Pariah (deemed the lowest in the social order of Kerala) who toil in the paddy fields—brim with a buoyancy seldom paralleled by other categories of songs. These songs of immemorial origin preserve all the traits of an old archaic style and instance adequately the naïveté which characterises folk songs in general. Here is a *Nhattu Pattu*—a song sung during the planting of paddy seedlings:

> The rains have rained so heavily,
> the small fields drenched so thoroughly,
> the fields, ploughed up and ready, lie,
> and seedlings tied and broadcast fly.
> Omala, Chennila, Mala,
> Kannamma, Kali, Karumbi
> Chatha, Chadaya and such like
> *cher'mi* farm-maids have all come;
> row beyond row they fall in line,
> and count up and share the seedling tufts,

and tuck up their clothes and bend down
to wind up, in concert, the planting;
Kannamma just then calls out
to Omala: "Hark, my dear friends,
all of you here a song must sing
ere the planting today is done."
And there then was seen the girl Tatta
crying perched on the harrow frame
which seeing, Omala said:
"Tell me Tatta, what brought you here?"

There is a song called the *Payyannur Pattu* which, according to Dr. Gundert, the eminent linguist and lexicographer, is one of the oldest in Malayalam, but it so happens that its full text is not extant.

Tribal people like the Velas, the Panas and the Kuravas have been an integral part of the social fabric of Kerala. Their services are deemed essential for the security and well-being of people living in the plains. Thus the Velas by their exorcistic prowess guard them from the evil spirits let loose by enemies, and the Pulluvas, by propitiatory rites, from the 'curse' of serpents. The chants which these classes use for the rituals are based largely on mythologies, and in regard to linguistic features are primitive, but they are lively and reflect the customs and manners of ancient Kerala. Incidentally, the syntactic and metrical patterns of these chants are helpful in tracing the evolution of the language of Kerala.

There is often a streak of poetry in the chants which the Velas use for their adjurations. The bedevilled woman is seated before the excorcist, and waving over her head a twig of the *elanji* tree he intones lines like the following:

By Hari, be it
the haunting spirit's end—eh
by Hari,
the haunting spirit's end!

With waving the twig
o'er the flow'r-decked hair
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

With waving the twig
o'ver the golden forehead
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

With waving the twig
o'er the mirror-like cheeks
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

With waving the twig
o'er the lake-like eyes,
be thou gone,
thou haunting spirit!

Panan Pattu, known also as the *Tuyilunarthu Pattu*, is a song for the 'waking up' of the family, and is sung even today in villages by Panan couples in the small hours of the morning in the month of Karkidakam (July-August), the last of the Malayalam calendar. The theme of the song is the conferment of a blessing by Lord Siva on a devotee, Tiruvarankathu Pananar by name, and listening to the song during the *tuyilunarthu*, the ritualistic 'waking up', is deemed to bring prosperity to the household. Of late the practice has lost much of its old popularity, yet the sight of men and women gathering round burning oil lamps to listen to the beneficent tale from the lips of the Panan couple and to make them presents of rice and coconuts is not altogether rare.

Pulluvan Pattu is associated with ophiolatry, an ancient cult of Kerala. Its burden is the origin, evolution and propagation of the serpent-race, and its recitation is deemed not only to propitiate the serpent-gods, but also to safeguard the family in the presence of which it is done from the 'curse' of those mysterious beings. A *pandal*, usually a thatched roof, is thrown up in front of the house, and life-like figures of five- or seven-hooded serpents are artistically drawn with multi-coloured powders; after this preparatory ritual, which is called *kalamezhuthu* or 'painting the yard', a Pulluva couple squat before the figures and intone their songs to the accom-

paniment of the *kudam*, a mud-pot sounded with a stick, and the *pulluvan vina*, a primitive violin.

The story of the *Kuravar Pattu*, known also as the *Nizhalkkuthu Pattu* is woven round the Mahabharata war. Instigated by Duryodhana, a Kurava casts a spell on the Pandavas with the black magic called the *nizhalkkuthu*—the term means 'stabbing the shadow'—and brings over them a death-like state. But the Kurathi, his wife, would not stand his treachery and, chanting the antidotal *mantra*, revives her favourites. The story of the Mahabharata, as retold by the Kuravas, has many deviations from the original: according to them, Kunti is the queen of Kurunad, and Gandhari of Karunad; the youngest of the Pandavas is Kunchu Piman or 'Little Bhima' and the Kauravas number only ninety-nine. Maybe, some rustic bard composed for them this version of the purana either at a time when the original was just becoming popular in Kerala, or earlier still—which is more probable viewed in the light of the primitive idiom of the song—when it was known here as a legend.

The aforesaid *pattus* are evidently indicative of a social system in which, at a comparatively prosperous period in Kerala's history, the upper classes were anxious to preserve their *status quo*, and willing, at the same time, to contribute to the sustenance of the humbler classes.

There is the unmistakable stamp of Dravidian culture, of Kerala's especially, in all these songs and rituals. It is true that the miscegenation consequent on the advent of the Aryans had exerted a profound influence on them. Thus the cult of Bhadrakali, which is essentially Dravidian in origin, was transformed in the course of centuries into the Aryan cult of Kali; the Pulluvas took over Vasuki from the Mahabharata, the Panans feature Siva and Parvati, and the Kuravas refer to the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Yet with all these borrowings, the songs breathe a primordial Dravidian spirit, and the related rituals hardly instance any exotic influence. The concept of the Mother in Kali-worship, the characters Daruka and Vetala who figure in the same, the rituals of the aforesaid sacerdotal tribes, their songs and the primitive language and the quaint idiom in which they are couched—all these bear the stamp of a basically Dravidian culture.

During those early centuries, when the songs and related

rituals came into being, the process of the miscegenation of the indigenous and exotic cultures was only just beginning, but with the rapid permeation of Sanskrit, its pace was considerably accelerated and, as a logical consequence, *vedic* rites found their way into the religious observances in Kerala. It cannot therefore be said that there is no trace of the Aryan practices in the rituals as they obtain today, nor that the vocabulary of Sanskrit is completely eschewed in related literature. The important point to note, however, is that, fundamentally, they are the products of the imagination of the children of the soil. And what fascinates us most today in this folk literature is not so much its inherent literary worth as its spontaneity and the light it throws on the social customs and the social structure of the ancient community. It indicates, moreover, the linguistic features of Malayalam as spoken by the common people, as unaffected by Tamil or Sanskrit. The spirit and personality of Malayalam in its pristine purity are best understood in the light of its folk songs.

There is a considerable body of folk literature which belongs to later periods and reflects the changes which came over the culture and the customs and manners of the people as time went by. Its merit as literature is not much, but the influence it could exert on the evolution of subsequent literature is by no means inconsiderable. It preserved the native purity of Malayalam at a time when Manipravala established the supremacy of Sanskrit as the all-important medium of scholastic and literary exercises and when, subsequently, the people became conscious of the artificiality engrained in such a medium, it provided the poets of the land with patterns which could become popular with the common people, contributing thus to the renaissance of the native tongue.

Side by side with the chants associated with the worship of Kali, the *Pulluvan Pattu*, the *Velan Pattu*, the *Panan Pattu* and the *Krishi Pattu*, there flourished a body of songs exclusively devised for the entertainment of the community. A good many of them are evidential of the fusion of cultures which followed the arrival of the Nambutiris, the best example being their Sanghakkali which is a complex art-form comprising votive recitations, much horse-play and physical feats. The invocation of Bhadrakali and Sasta, the presiding deities of Kerala, at

the beginning of the performance, goes to show that the Sanghakkali songs were composed after the Nambutiris became thoroughly domiciled to the land of their adoption. The rites are many: the *purvangam* (prologue), the *nalu padam* (four-feet), the *pana* (singing), *vattamirippu kali* (playing in a circle), the *Kaimalute varavu* (Kaimal's arrival), the *ayudhameduppu* (taking the weapons), and so on. The devotional and humorous songs which punctuate a Sanghakkali performance are deemed to denote the oldest style of singing in Kerala. The *Purakkali Pattu* of the Teeyas of North Kerala illustrates another ancient style of singing. The list would indeed be a long one if the songs associated with marriages, the spring festival of women called the Tiruvatira, the regional festival of Onam, the boat races, the *kolkkali* or the 'stick dances', etc. are also to be enumerated. The tide of modern civilisation has in its wake swept away many of them, but what remains by itself constitutes a rich variety.

3. *Vadakkan Pattu*

No account of the ancient folk literature of Kerala would be complete without reference to the immense body of ballads extant today. Noted for their thematic excellence and metrical perfection, these ballads extol the heroic deeds of men and women who lived at a time when personal valour and the mastery of arms decided all the worthwhile endeavours of life. The most important compositions which fall under this category are of the saga called the *Vadakkan Pattu* (the 'Northern Ballad') a collection of medieval origin. The doings of the heroes and heroines—men like Aromal Chevakar, Tacholi Otenan, Thacholi Chantu and Palattu Koman, and women like Unniyarcha and Matu—would seem to us superhuman, at any rate exaggerated, but they are not without foundation in the social history of Kerala. No social criticism, apparently, is meant by the anonymous bards but some kind of a back-cloth had to be supplied by them for the actions of their heroes and heroines, and from this we could decipher the set-up of that feudal society—the customs and manners of the people, their systems of marriage and inheritance, the features of their domestic ceremonies and the temple festivals,

their beliefs, superstitions, education and physical training, status of women, the pastimes of the community and the general pattern of social behaviour. It cannot be said that the ballads are of any high literary standard, but their naïveté is indeed charming.

And how language lent itself to the general style of conversation in medieval Kerala is also illustrated by the *Vadakkan Pattu*. The idiom is extremely simple and unadorned, but the effect is something that cannot normally be achieved with high-flown expressions or literary artifices. In fact it would seem that the simplicity of the narration enhances the grandeur of the heroic deeds extolled in the narratives. The descriptions are in a realistic vein, but the sense of power and magnificence which they evoke is such as can hardly be attained with the use of imageries. This forthrightness of idiom is a universal feature of the ballads and lines like the following illustrate, besides, the prowess in physical feats which the heroes are said to have possessed so abudantly:

> And from there Aromar rises
> and pulls the stool to position:
> He spreads on it the battle-skirt
> and puts on it a metal plate,
> fills the plate with polished rice
> and lays on it a coconut,
> and then upon the coconut
> a red ripe arecanut,
> and an egg upon the nut ;
> and then upon the egg
> he sticks a pin and upon the pin's point
> the coil-blade, and then he mounts
> atop the point of the blade
> and dances fast the seven dances.

The invincible Unniyarcha decks herself in the following fashion while setting out to see the *koothu* or festival at Allimalarkavu, the 'grove of blossoms':

> Goes to the sandalwood fraying stone,
> rubs the sandalwood, wets the paste

and streaks the forehead with the paste
and puts on it the *tilak* mark
seeing herself in the looking glass
and, within it, the saffron mark;
knots the beautiful flowing hair
and paints her eyes with collyrium
and dots her brow with vermilion
and smears her body with sandal and musk
.....
And with a dagger girdles her waist.

The last line needs a word of explanation, for a dagger can hardly be a trinket which women cherish. But in medieval Kerala there was nothing unusual about women attending the *kalaris*—the military gymnasia—where fencing and other methods of offence and defence were taught and gaining proficiency in the use of arms to enable them guard themselves. Hence there is nothing surprising about Unniyarcha decking herself with a dagger too.

Though the dominant *rasa* of the *Vadakkan Pattu* is the heroic, it is by no means the only one. There are passages instinct with such sentiments as *karuna* (compassion), and *sringara* (erotic) also. The deaths of Aromal Chevakar and Otenan are, for instance, portrayed with such poignacy as could draw tears from the hardest of hearts; and the love of the sensuous is not altogether avoided while singing of the loves of the heroes and heroines. That the bards were richly endowed with aesthetic sensibilities can be instanced by any number of passages, only they did not indulge in far-fetched similies or metaphors as their contemporaries, the Manipravala poets, did. The imageries which the composers of the *Vadakkan Pattu* chose are such as would occur effortlessly to the artless imagination of rustic bards; and that they are none the less poetic can be vouched for by the following soliloquy of Kandan Menon who loses his head over Matu, the valiant wife of Thacholi Chantu:

Are there such women in this world?
Has she perchance fallen from heaven?
Or perchance from the earth sprung up?

What can I say of her complexion!—
like to the cassia in bloom on the hill,
the sapling of mango shooting its leaves,
or like the hue of the tender palm leaf,
or of the Wayanadan turmeric flake?

The earliest compositions in this saga do not date back beyond the sixteenth century, but their idiom and vocabulary would seem to be much older. They seem to mark the last phase of the medieval epoch in the evolution of the Malayalam language. It is plausible that a good many ballads on identical themes composed in the earlier centuries are now lost to us, but what the linguistic and literary features of those songs were can be inferred from the collection now available. At a time when literature of a scholastic type was produced under the tutelage of either Chentamil or Sanskrit, and the language itself was undergoing a series of transformations under the impact of Sanskrit, the *Vadakkan Pattu* kept away from the aforesaid influences, maintaining consequently the innate strength and shades of the spoken tongue of the ordinary folk. That it could not keep away for long from the main current is altogether a different question.

4. *Krishna Gatha*

At the time when ballads like *Vadakkan Pattu* provided for the common people their sole literary nourishment, themes and ideas from Sanskrit too were infiltrating into their midst. The logical outcome of this infiltration was a change in literary propensities and the replacement of the unlettered bards by more learned ones who, while adapting the same musical folk metres, could compose on the popular exotic themes. It was a beneficent change, for it enriched Malayalam with an excellent body of noble literature, notably *Krishna Gatha* or *Krishna Pattu* composed towards the middle of the fifteenth century.

It is apparent that the metrical forms of *Krishna Gatha* are adapted from folk literature. Its affinity with *Vadakkan Pattu* is significant. Presumably most of the ballads extant now might have been composed after *Krishna Gatha* but, as was

pointed out earlier, they marked the culmination of the literary tradition of a much earlier origin.

Cherusseri Nambutiri, poet of *Krishna Gatha*, lived at a time when Manipravala was the prevailing literary genre. But he would not fall in line with the Manipravala poets in regard to themes nor would he borrow the diction of Sanskrit, save very sparingly. The theme of his *magnum opus*—the story of Krishna as told in the Bhagavata—and its inescapable association with the thought-patterns of the Aryans would normally necessitate the adoption of the Manipravala medium, but it would seem as though he was deliberate in linking the idiom of his poetry as intimately with the spoken tongue of Kerala as possible. Thus *Krishna Gatha* was in a sense a challenge to the *champus* of the later Manipravala phase which not only borrowed the vocabulary of Sanskrit unreservedly but even its inflexions. Cherusseri was erudite in Sanskrit, was well versed in the puranas and, being a Nambutiri, was bred in the best traditions of Aryan culture. Yet, first and foremost, he was a Malayali, and wrote his *kavya* for the edification of the Malayalis. Indeed he was the first poet anterior to Ezhuthachan to handle the puranas with a vision and individuality all his own, and the pioneer to strike the first notes of modernism in Malayalam poetry.

The poetry of *Krishna Gatha* is simplicity itself. Not a trace of ambiguity is discernible anywhere, so clear and direct is Cherussseri's muse. The plenitude of the figures of speech is another feature of the work, but in sharp contrast to a good many *kavyas* in Malayalam wherein the figures are plagiarised versions of identical ones in Sanskrit or are used, not without much artificiality for their own sake, the *upamas* and *utprekshas* of Cherusseri are characterised by a natural elegance which gives one the impression that they spring up spontaneously. They coalesce with the narrative so smoothly and contribute to defining and clarifying the thought-processes of the poet so powerfully that the emotive and aesthetic qualities of the poem are very much enhanced, and no diversion to the labyrinthine channels often created by strained fancies in search of images is involved.

The artistry of the pen-pictures drawn by him, so abundant and yet so various, is indeed inimitable. His poetry is a true

index of his personality: his disarming sincerity, his unreserved identification with the situations he depicts and the logical clarity with which he bodies them forth. For instance, when he describes the pranks of children at Ambadi he does not keep aloof as a detached observer would, so that he can compose his picture from the correct perspective, but romps with them—for such is the impression his descriptions give—participating, perhaps, in their frolics with child-like joy:

> Straight would they run out when the rains descend
> to stand beneath the eaves of the roof
> and take the torrent full on them;
> and when some one would approach nigh
> to pull them away by the hand, would shout
> '*ayyo*!' and raise a hue and cry;
> and when they eat ripe plantain fruits
> would put them eke to the mouths of toys—
> toys, so wondrous, by sculptors bestowed;
> and then would each give his mother a toy
> and plead with her: "Please suckle it."
> And when they drop on the laps of sleep
> would lay beside them their toys too;
> and when they see their reflections
> on the bright begemmed floors,
> would smile bewitching smiles and run
> to clasp them—their own reflections!

In portraying episodes like Akrura's arrival at Ambadi and the *Rasa Krida*, it would appear as though the poet had actually seen those sights and had participated in those situations, so vivid and convincing are his delineations.

But all this ingenuity in presenting lively pictures of scenes and situations would hardly have mattered much had it not been sweetened with his abounding humanity. Kamsa is done away with and Krishna goes straight to the prison to release Nandagopa. Embracing his foster-father he exclaims:

> Upon the feet of Achyuta,
> I know no father other than thee;

nor do I think of a different one
for a mother who gave me birth and life;
thou art the one who nurtured me
protecting me from fire and flood;
and so, even if I forget myself,
never indeed can I forget thee
. . . . . .
And kindly then request my mother
to hold me in her remembrance.

In turn, the foster-parents too bear for Krishna an affection equally deep. Krishna, grown old, meets the aged Nandagopa and Yasoda at Bhargava Tirtha, and the meeting provides Cherusseri scope for the expression of some delectable heart-warming pleasantries. Yasoda embracing Krishna enquires:

There is no wound, I trow,
in thy tender flower-like frame
caused by the cord I bound thee with
and tightened for thy naughtiness.

And Nandagopa adds, his words heavy with emotion:

The dreams I've dreamed so ceaselessly
are truths today, for so I say,
for I could embrace my darling child
as I've done in the days bygone.
Would you now, Kanna, like to play
the mahout-and-elephant, clambering
on to my back, or on to my neck
to raise thine arms for the distant moon,
or run up to me and seat thyself
upon my lap and pull my beard?

It often happens that when a poet draws upon the store of his experiences for material for his poesy, the cricumstances of his life would also get into it, perhaps inadvertently. In the case of Cherusseri, although the subject matter of his poetry is puranic, the background of his descriptions is Kerala complete; it would seem as though the *ritus*, the seasons, of

Kerala prevailed at Ambadi too. The descriptions of the rains, the spring, the summer and the winter are inexhaustibly lovely, but hardly can one notice any difference between those of Kerala and of *Krishna Gatha*.

The Nambutiris, as a class, are noted for their wit and humour, and Cherusseri is no exception. All the situations which the theme would lend for a little fun are exploited to the best advantage, and indeed there is a subtle current of humour throughout the work. Disguised as a *sanyasin*, Arjuna gains the presence of his beloved, Subhadra, and accepts from her hands his *bhiksha*, food. But oblivious of what she is doing, infatuated with love for her hero, Subhadra serves him the skin of the plantain fruit instead of the fruit itself, and equally oblivious of what he is doing, being overwhelmed with the presence of his beloved, Arjuna consumes the whole lot as if it were some ambrosial fare! Cherusseri's humour gives one the impression of a delicate gauze clothing the entire body of the poem, situations which call for a more solemn treatment not exempted, gathering occasionally into folds of gentle satire.

Viewed as a whole *Krishna Gatha* is perhaps the first, and undoubtedly one of the foremost, works in Malayalam which sprang from the poet's direct intuitive experience. How profound its influence has been over the whole course of subsequent poetry would be made clear when, later in the book, we take up modern poetry for our consideration.

CHAPTER V

MANIPRAVALA—THE LATER PHASE

1. *The Champus: Punam and Mazhamangalam*

The canons laid down by *Lilatilakam* were not sacrosanct to the later-day poets; its injunction that the vocabulary of Manipravala should be weighted in favour of Malayalam was particularly objectionable to them. It was the ever-increasing fascination which Sanskrit and its literature held for the poets and scholars of Kerala that opened the flood-gates of the medium in use to a higher influx of the Sanskritic vocabulary. And when the poets chose to retell for their compatriots the tales of the puranas and the *itihasas* instead of confining themselves to more topical ones like those of *Unniyachi Charitam* and *Unniyadi Charitam* the process of saturating Malayalam with the exotic vocabulary became complete. To begin with, they translated, adapted and imitated the masterpieces in Sanskrit and, when they became sure of their ground, recast them freely in the mould of their own genius. The literature thus produced under the shadow of Sanskrit constitutes a new category; and in this latter phase of Manipravala the most important works are the *Champu Prabandhas*.

Although in themes and treatment the *champus* of Manipravala bear a close resemblance to those of Sanskrit, they bear, in their poetry, the distinctive imprint of Kerala. The authors of the *champus* could not ignore the demands of popular taste, nor would they translate or imitate the originals slavishly. What they did was the reconstruction of the original tales against the background, and in keeping with the literary traditions, of Kerala. Thus the style of the narration approximates to anything else narrated for a Kerala audience, the imageries are drawn from Kerala, and the undertone of humour also is of the variety familiar to Keralites. There is, besides, a generous proportion of the indigenous vocabulary in them to assist in the comprehension of the whole. The one reason why Sanskrit was used so profusely was to enhance

the diction of the prose and verse of the *champus*, and not for its own sake, nor because Malayalam was less expressive. It is evident, at any rate, that *champus* in Manipravala were intelligible to the common reader while those of Sanskrit were hardly so. The prose interspersed throughout these works evinces two distinct features; it has a metrical pattern and it is embellished with as many, if not more, of imageries as the verse itself.

The *champus* constitute an immense body of Manipravala literature. Indeed the age of the *champus* was the golden age of Manipravala. Of the puranas and *itihasas* from which the composers drew their material, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the most important. It would not be easy to draw up an exhaustive list of the *champus* in Malayalam, they are so many. But we know that among the major ones the following would find a place: *Ramayana Champu*, *Bharata Champu*, *Naishadha Champu*, *Ravana Vijayam Champu*, *Rukmini Swayamvaram Champu*, *Kamadahanam Champu*, *Rajaratnavaliyam Champu* and *Kodiyaviraham Champu*. The authorship of most of these works has not yet been fixed, but we know for certain that Punam Nambutiri and Mazhamangalam Nambutiri are the most outstanding names and that theirs are the most important works.

Punam who is featured in *Chandrotsavam*, a contemporary *kavya*, in lines like

> With countless works in prose and verse,
> which with ambrosial scent is filled
> the fame of Punam still radiates
> unto the bounds of horizons,

is undoubtedly an engaging personality. There were, according to a popular legend, 'eighteen-and-a-half poets' in the court of a fifteenth century Zamorin of Calicut, and Punam, it is said, was that 'half-poet'. It is inconceivable how he, of all poets, could only be a 'half-poet'. It is generally believed that eighteen poets composed in Sanskrit and hence were deemed 'full poets' and Punam who composed in Manipravala could only be regarded a 'half-poet'.

The *magnum opus* among his works is *Ramayana Champu*, a

very voluminous work covering the entire story of the Ramayana, from the birth of Ravana up to the ascension of Rama. The whole story is conceived as twenty episodes and each episode is treated in a separate *prabandha*. The diction of Sanskrit sets the general tone but scattered throughout are beautiful passages illustrative of the *uttama* patterns in Manipravala. The harmonies spun out of choice words from both the languages, the impression of familiarity the verse imparts even while the vocabulary is almost exclusively Sanskritic, the delightful delineation of men and nature, imageries which illumine an infinite variety of ideas and emotions and the subjectivity of approach in describing situations commend Punam to the votaries of Manipravala literature. Of the innumerable portraits with which the work is embellished, here is one, of Sita at the time of *swayamvara*, with bridal garland in hand, entering the scene:

> The throng was hushed when garland in hand—
> its fragrance holding the crowd in thrall—
> Sita rose, her countenance sweet
> adorned with jasmine-smiles, and women
> of auspicious import escorting,
> the heavy hips slackening her pace,
> and eyes with sidelong glances brimming,
> slowly she moved in, Lord Kama's flower-dart.
>
> Her hands the lovely garland holding,
> and beetles o'er the flowers humming,
> whelmed with virgin modesty, stealing
> intermittent looks of Rama's face,
> and leaning on her confidantes
> the scene she illumined with her grace;
> and trembling with joy she walked slowly
> up to her lord, with beautiful steps.

Mazhamangalam Nambutiri is another important name in the history of *champu* literature, and though he does not command the same prestige as Punam, his eminence as a poet is beyond question. Besides *Naishadham*, his most important contribution to *champu* literature, he is credited with

the authorship of some lesser known works of the same category, such as *Rajaratnavaliyam*, *Kodiyaviraham* and *Banayuddham*.

In his handling of puranic themes, his attitude is more independent in comparison to that of his confrères. He borrows a story, and the story alone, and reconstructs it in a free and original manner, drawing exclusively upon his own resources. Thus *Naishadham*, a story that has been treated in a wide variety of ways in Sanskrit, assumes an altogether refreshing glow when it becomes the subject of his *champu*. As a lyrical poet his talent is of the first order and his idiom, which is very simple, has a rare evocative power. King Nala is vanquished by his younger brother Pushkara in the gambling contest and Damayanti sets out with her lord to the forest. Her maids-in-waiting offer to accompany her, but she would not agree to their sharing her misery:

> Follow me not, dear friends mine,
> bewailing, as I do, engulfed
> in the ocean of God's great wrath—
> for such happens to be my fate.
> I lived in peace and happiness
> with my lord, King Nala, but now
> I must take to the forest: what more
> is writ in my head, I do not know.
>
> In the strength of observances,
> in prowess in the battle-field,
> in regal pomp and majesty
> and plenitude of noble traits
> there's none, alas! like him, and yet
> by the foul fiend dragged and tormented
> he fought the gambling fray: am I
> the cause, my friends? I do not know.

Rajaratnavaliyam and *Kodiyaviraham* differ from the rest of the *champus* in that their themes are not puranic, but partly historical and partly imaginary. The first work centres round Rama Varma, a raja of Cochin (A.D. 1565–1595) and his alleged love for a Vidyadhara, a celestial nymph, Mandaramala by name. He is, according to the *champu*, a

mighty prince, and is fortunate in his strange romance. *Kodiyaviraham* too is largely a work of fiction. A Kshatriya youth, Sangitaketu by name, falls in love with Sringara-chandrika, a beauty who comes to see the Pooram festival at Trichur. They spend some time together as lovers, are separated by circumstances beyond their control and reunited ultimately in happy wedlock. The two *champus* have a bearing on the social history of Kerala: they throw some light on the features of contemporary society.

There are many more *champus* which deserve mention, the more important being *Chellurnadhodayam*, *Narayaniyam*, *Tenkailasanadhodayam*, *Kamsa Vadhom*, *Dakshayagam*, *Syamantakam*, and *Kaliyamardanam*. The authorship of all these works still remains unknown, and though the literary worth of some of them at least leaves much to be desired, they represent on the whole the hectic literary activity which went on in Kerala in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The *champu* has long since ceased to be a live literary force; however, the role it played in building up Malayalam literature cannot be overemphasised. It marks a phase in the evolution of that literature when poets could not only assimilate the spirit and content of Sanskrit but express the same through their medium with even greater force and sensibility. It is not usual that lyrical imagination combines harmoniously with conventional classical themes, nor the humour characterisitc of a people goes hand in hand with tales exotic to them, but the Nambutiris could achieve it, thanks to their being Aryans as well as Keralites. It may be mentioned incidentally that the tone of the humour which characterises much of subsequent poetry was primarily set by the *champus* and the Chakyarkoothu, an indigenous dance-drama.

The role the *champus* played in evolving the idiom of the language also was not a minor one. At a time when Sanskrit was universally acknowledged the noblest medium for literary expression, it was almost a sacrifice on the part of the authors of *champus* to compose in Manipravala which, though weighted in favour of Sanskrit, was adequately intelligible to the common people. The case of Punam who was dubbed a 'half-poet' because he composed in Manipravala is relevant to the point. The ultimate result of their condescension as manifest

in their incorporation of a good amount of the vocabulary of the common people into the texture of their poetry was the elevation of Malayalam into a literary medium and the preservation of its primordial features. Interspersed throughout the *champus* are fine specimens of Manipravala which the author of *Lilatilakam* would enthusiastically have hailed as *uttama* had he belonged to a later generation. These specimens have had a far-reaching effect on the entire course of subsequent poetry, for they served as patterns even to moderns like Vallathol.

The passages in prose which punctuate the verse also had a bearing on later poetry: poets like Kunchan Nambyar adapted the metres of the prose compositions for their Tullal works. As a matter of fact, the verse of the Tullals hardly differs in its metrical forms from the prose of the *champus*. Nambyar took yet another clue from them: the tone of satire which permeates his works was set for him by the works of Punam who was a satirist also.

It would thus seem that even though the *champus* are a closed chapter today, they could influence the entire course of later Malayalam poetry.

2. *Chandrotsavam, Muktakas, etc.*

The *champus* constitute but only one branch, though a major one, of Manipravala literature. There were yet other forms—the *kavya* or epic, the *stotra* or hymn, the *otta slokas* or single quatrains, etc.

Chandrotsavam is the only work so far discovered which falls under the category of *kavya*. Composed in five *sargas* (cantos) and five hundred and seventy quatrains, it has for its subject a story involving both men and gods. A Kinnara indulging in amorous pleasures with her Gandharva lover in the valley of the Emerald Mount is attracted by an unearthly fragrance which, she presumes, emanates from some mysterious flower. She requests her lover to procure the flower for her and the Gandharva, ever ready to oblige her whims, sets out on his mission of love following the trail of the fragrance. And that takes him to a place called Chikkilappalli near Trichur in Central Kerala where, to his great surprise, he

learns that the perfume originates from a divine lamp which the courtesan Medini Vennilavu—'Moonlight of the Earth'—lit to celebrate *Chandrotsavam*, the Festival of the Moon. He camps there for a while to witness the celebrations and returning to his beloved, gives her a vivid account of all that he heard and saw. The circumstances of the courtesan's life, her birth and upbringing, her plans to celebrate the *Chandrotsavam*, the dignitaries who participated in the celebrations—aristocratic Brahmins, Sanghakkali performers, poets and courtesans—and details of the Gandharva's journey are all delineated in vivid detail in the *kavya*. Allowing a certain margin for the fanciful nature of the descriptions and idealised views of life—features quite common in Manipravala literature—we can still gain from it a glimpse into the medieval society of Kerala. It begins with a panegyric on the land:

> Eight other regions around us there are
> of which South Bharat, lovely one,
> is enchanting; and there we have
> the glorious land of Cheraman
> like to the graceful *tilak* mark
> beautifying all the three worlds,
> and a fertile habitation
> worthy of Lakshmi and Kama.

The six *slokas* which follow are in a patriotic vein, something unusual in Manipravala poetry.

When a courtesan is chosen as the heroine of a *kavya* it would be natural to expect that her friends and acquaintances who appear in it also would be votaries of Kama. It is even so in *Chandrotsavam*, and justifiably enough, the reader would get the impression that chastity was never a strong point with the women of medieval Kerala. But this is far from the truth: though sex was seldom a taboo, sexual promiscuity was not a habit with that society. The introduction of a courtesan in the *kavya* as the central figure is simply a poetic device—and it is in keeping with the Manipravala tradition in which the erotic is the dominant *rasa*—to create enough compass for recounting feminine charm at greater length.

It would therefore be wrong to suppose that the women of *Chandrotsavam* represent the women of medieval Kerala.

The poet seems to be conscious of the loveliness of his idiom as also his lyrical abilities, for he has no hesitation to declare that his poetry is couched in *Madhumadhura bhasha samskrutanyonya sammelana surabhila*, that is to say, 'fragrant with the blending of sweet *bhasha* (Malayalam) with Sanskrit'. That his claim is by no means extravagant can be testified by almost all the slokas of *Chandrotsavam*.

Countless are the *muktakas* or quatrains composed during the period, either as eulogies on kings or as supplications to fair women. The best of these extant now are the compositions of the court-poets of the Zamorin of Calicut, Punam and Mazhamangalam in particular, and the personages extolled by them, Manavikrama Raja and Manavedan Raja, their patrons.

The age of Manipravala was, on the whole, one of unprecedented enthusiasm for poetry. Leadership came from the court of the Zamorin where, in spite of battles and invasions which were the order of the day, the poets had a fine time of it. Brahmins and poets were always held in the highest esteem by all the princes of Kerala irrespective of whence they came or who their whilom patrons were, and so they could compose in peace without being unduly concerned about the political fortunes of princes and the attendant vicissitudes in regard to patronage. And that is the prime reason why contemporary issues do not figure prominently in Manipravala literature.

CHAPTER VI

DEVOTIONAL AND DIDACTIC POETRY

1. *Ezhuthachan, Harbinger of the Modern Age*

It might be clear from the preceding chapters that the language and literature of Kerala manifest two dominant tendencies in their evolution up to the sixteenth century: one, folk literature which embodies the primordial characteristics of Malayalam and the other, Manipravala produced under the impact of Sanskrit. It was inevitable that of these two categories of poetic literature the latter with its hold over the intelligentsia and the popularity it could steadily gain among the common people should play the more important part with the progress of time. As a matter of fact, all the poets and scholars of the land were plainly biased in favour of Sanskrit and its literature. And, as a natural corollary, the *pattu* with its leanings towards Tamil in respect of form and vocabulary and its later variations were steadily becoming obsolete.

But with all the encouragement given to Sanskrit and the recognition of Manipravala as a better medium for literary expression, Malayalam in its pristine purity could still persist, thanks to its being the spoken tongue of the common people. The influx of Sanskrit was unavoidable in the circumstances, and indeed that proved to be a beneficent influence on the growth of Malayalam literature, but it was not permitted, so to say, to effect any change in the basic linguistic features of the native speech.

We have seen earlier how in the *pattu* and in the Manipravala, Malayalam could preserve its innate vitality in spite of the strain it had to brave under the burden of extraneous vocabularies. That it could withstand the pressure of even the highly Sanskritised idiom of poets like Punam and Mazhamangalam might well be taken to indicate its strength and solidity as a language.

In this context we have also to bear in mind that a good deal of poetry was written giving importance to the Malayalam

language. Of such *Krishna Gatha* is a vital creation. Following the lead given by Cherusseri, many more poets took to composing in the idiom of the common people and consequently Malayalam literature was enriched with works like *Bharata Gatha*, *Bhagavatam Pattu*, *Darika Vadhom Pattu* and *Setubandhanam Pattu*. The fact that these works were written in the traditional musical metres serves to show that Manipravala, by itself, could not meet all the demands of popular taste and that the indigenous style still had an appeal for the people. The one reason which retarded the further growth of this branch of literature was the absence, over a long period of time, of poets of the stature of Cherusseri.

It was at this juncture that a new star swam into the literary ken in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Ezhuthachan had arrived.

He entered the stage with a new message for literature. Partly the product of evolutionary processes and partly deliberate and constructive, his approach was such as would transform the form and content of poetry.

He could assess correctly the trends of the times and strike out on an altogether new path, reconciling the divergent tastes and styles which held the field. He felt that the ideal medium would be the one which incorporates the essentials of Manipravala which was the prime literary force of the day into the texture of Malayalam with its innate strength and simplicity. The result was the avoidance of a permanent rift between the two styles and the creation of a nascent strain and manner in poetry.

His experiment which was immensely successful consisted in adapting the many musical couplet forms known in his day to the Manipravala vocabulary of the *uttama* variety, that is to say, the vocabulary in which Malayalam plays the dominant role. The singableness of the Dravidian couplet and the expressiveness of Manipravala blended extremely well in his hands, and that ushered in a new pattern in poetry which holds the field even today.

The times warranted a radical change in the purpose and content of literature. It was altogether an unhappy period in the social and political history of Kerala. The land was cut up into numberless petty principalities, and between the

rulers of these and their vassals wars were constant. The intrusion of foreign traders—the Arabs, the Portuguese and other Westerners—who, for the furtherance of their commercial interests, played one party against the other in their dissensions, contributed vastly to the deterioration in social amity and standards of morality. The disquiet and frustration which thus became pronounced reacted adversely on the traditional systems of education and the culture patterns of the community, and the attendant chaos which threatened to overwhelm all that was built up over the centuries warranted a master who could not only check it but open out new avenues of hope for a frustrated people. It was no easy task for even the greatest of men, but Ezhuthachan could meet the challenge, and meet it admirably too. That he was more than equipped for the high undertaking was indeed a godsend: a profound scholar, a master of the *vedic*, puranic and philosophical lore of the country, a sage and a mystic, he was eminently qualified to be a preceptor to the people. At no time before in the history of Kerala had a *guru* of comparable greatness come forward to guide them and rejuvenate their literature.

There had been no dearth of puranic tales in Kerala ever since *Ramacharitam*. But no poet had, except perhaps the Kannassans, delved deep into the spiritual and philosophic values embedded in them and treated them seriously enough for the edification of the masses. The main difficulty with the Kannassans was their language: its affinity with Tamil militated against popular taste, especially when Manipravala was acknowledged as a nobler medium. Moreover, their works did not offer that spiritual solace which was the need of the hour to a furstrated people. As for Cherusseri, he was indubitably a great poet, but the humour with which he spiced his work made him ill-suited for the role of a preceptor. Thus the trail on which Ezhuthachan set forth was altogether an unexplored one.

It was spiritual solace that Ezhuthachan offered to his compatriots. His whole being was so thoroughly saturated with the most ardent devotion for the Supreme Being in His different manifestations that whenever he sang His tales, he would also sing of the infinite peace that is in His name. So sincere was he in his outpourings and so sweet the melody

of his numbers, that he was irresistible to the masses, and his exhortations carried with them immediate conviction. Above all, the tone he set for his poetry was not the *rasa* of the Manipravala kind, achieved as it was with a lot of superficial trappings and a sensuous imagination, but edifying emotions adorning the eternal verities which a mystic alone can realise and delineate.

If at a time when the erotic was the dominant *rasa* and entertainment was the sole purpose of literary activity, a poet could meditate on the destinies of man and the mysteries of life and come forward with such questionings as

> If the phenomenal world were true—
> the earth, its kingdoms, the mortal garb
> of man, his riches and the rest—
> it only means how embroiled thou art;
> and if it meet not thy reasonings,
> what then indeed does it profit thee?—

it means for certain that such a one, Ezhuthachan, elevated the thought-processes of the people to a higher level and imparted to their literature a more solemn diction than was ever attained before.

But this return to matters of the spirit was not a feature exclusive to Kerala, there were parallel forces working throughout the country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was the period when the Vaishnava poets were enriching most literatures of India with their mystic outpourings; in Bengal there were the disciples of Ramanuja, a continuous line, and of many a caste; there were in the north Kabir, Surdas and Tulsidas writing in the various earlier forms of Hindi. The tide of devotional literature was steadily rising in the South as well. The sojourn of Sri Krishna Chaitanya —he came to Kerala also—heralded a renaissance in the cult of Krishna worship. But even before his arrival there were, in most of the languages of this zone, poets who made substantial contributions to the devotional literature in their respective languages. Thus Tukaram and Sridhara retold Vaishnava tales for the Marathi audience; Jagannatha for the Oriya; and Kanakadasa and Venkitadasa for the Kannada.

And of course, Tamilnad had no dearth of Vaishnava poets even before the days of Kamban.

Devotional literature had its votaries in Kerala from the days of *Ramacharitam*, but it was with Ezhuthachan that it became an active principle in the cultural life of the community. There is one circumstance about his life which singles him out from the rest of his confrères in the field of letters: he was not a Brahmin. No doubt, he had his counterparts in other parts of the country, in Tukkaram who was a Sudra, and in Kanakadasa, the composer of *Krishnacharita* and *Vishnusara* in Kannada, a Veda, but it was the first time, except the Kannassans, that a non-Brahmin of Kerala took to singing the puranic tales and the mysteries of the spirit which, until then, were deemed the exclusive preserves of the sacerdotal caste. The *bhakti* literature composed in all the Indian languages in the earlier centuries had permeated into the lower strata of the society also, and fascinated by the new themes and the spiritual ideologies embedded in them, the more enlightened ones of that strata chose to retelling them for the edification of their fellowmen in a familiar and intelligible idiom. We have seen earlier that Kerala had a cultural pattern of its own, different from and largely unaffected by that of the immigrant Brahmins. And when the Kannassans, and later Ezhuthachan, adopted the exotic themes for their poetry, they mixed them up with a generous dose of that indigenous culture. Naturally enough, there was opposition from the Nambutiris—many legends are extant which speak of their animosity to Ezhuthachan himself—but malice could hardly be a deterrent to the course of genius.

Bhakti, the devotional sentiment, was the all-absorbing passion with Ezhuthachan. And in Adhyatma Ramayana and Mahabharata he discovered themes which would lend themselves admirably for its untrammelled expression. An important feature of Ezhuthachan's poetry is this: that it is a reconstruction in a free and individualistic manner of the original tale, and even while it follows the model rather closely, as in portions of Adhyatma Ramayana, it could show in almost every line of it the clear impress of its author's personality. Quite often we find the poet deviate from the origianl, and borne on the tides of mystic raptures, pour

forth unceasing strains of eulogies on his beloved deity, even at the cost of poetic relevance. It is particularly evident in contexts which call for a worshipful attitude on the part of a character towards the incarnated Supreme Being of that tale, Rama or Krishna. Indeed, he is second to none of the great mystics of India insofar as his devotional fervour is concerned. Its unmistakable note is struck even at the beginning of every canto when he requests the parrot to sing for him the beneficent tale:[1]

Recite, recite thou parrot maid,
thou crowning garland of thy race!
Pour forth for me the nectared lore
of Krishna's sports! A better feast
I know not here, it casts away
all the griefs my heart assail.

When in situations he feels the compelling need to pronounce the name of Rama or Krishna, he is seldom satisfied with one or two epithets or synonyms; to string a multitude of these into lovely garlands for the adoration of them proves at once his passion and virtuosity.

Induśēkharavandyanindubimbāsyanambujan
Indrādi vrundāraka vrunda vanditan Paran
Indirāvaran, Nandanandanan, Narāyaṇan
Chandrikāmandasmitasundaran, Damōdaran

The Adored of the crescent-decked Siva,
the One with the moon-like face,
the One in the water born,
the Worshipped of the celestial ones like Indra,
Supreme Being,
Lord of Indira
and son to Nanda,
Narayana (on the sea sleeping),
and handsome with a smile

[1] The Adhyatma Ramayana and the Mahabharata of Ezhuthachan are called *Kili Pattus*—literally 'parrot songs'—because he features a parrot as the singer of the tales.

like the shining moon,
Damodara (with rope round the waist).

This kind of *stotra* runs into many lines, and any number of them can be culled from almost every canto of the two epics.

And whenever a context lends itself to painting the many charms of his lord, he seldom fails to do so, suspending, if necessary, the progress of the narrative for the time being. Here, for example, is a portrait of Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer, taken from the *Karna Parva* of the Mahabharata:

The peacock-plumes in glorious hues,
in rows arrayed and tufted fine
above the forehead, and the dense
and cloud-like hair and lovely crown
resplendent with glittering gems
and wavy locks, diffused and rich
with filmy dust inlaying them,
and the *tilak* moist with sweat,
and the beauty of the eyebrows pair
which creates, sustains, destroys
. . . . . .
And the pair of lotus-feet—
I saw him grace the chariot,
even as enshrined in my heart,
satiating my inmost longings.
May He be seen with Vijayan
playing *sans* change a little more!

2. *Adhyatma Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

Ezhuthachan gives pride of place to the exposition of didactic and spiritual principles in his Ramayana. In passages like the exhortation to Lakshmana, the consoling of Tara and the many hymns on Rama, we have a fine segment of philosophic thought in Malayalam poetry. As a piece of poetry too, the work ranks among the very best. Even his translations breathe a grace and freshness comparable to

anything else composed in Kerala. It is the sweetness of his idiom and the lucidity of his thinking which, more than anything else, have contributed to this unique quality of his poetry. It is an easily recognisable style, for it is so personal and inimitable. The content unites so happily with the form that each one contributes to the strength and beauty of the other. There are no major deviations from the original story, but whenever an appropriate context presents itself for its further embellishment, he does not hesitate to do so. The childhood of Rama and his brothers, Rama's duel with Parasurama, the entrance of Surpanakha, the death of Bali, the destruction of Lanka and the battle with Ravana are some of the major episodes which Ezhuthachan treats in a free and original manner. That he has vastly improved upon the Sanskrit model would be evident from even a cursory glance of the two versions.

But it is in the Mahabharata that, as a poet, Ezhuthachan shows his real mettle. The reason is obvious: being a free adaptation of the original purana, he found in it enough latitude for the full play of his poetic genius. It is, in a sense, an abridgement of the original epic, but it has been retold so cleverly that even while preserving the fundamental thought-patterns of the original, he could enhance its poignancy by shearing off some of its unwieldy ramifications.

The pivot of Ezhuthachan's story is Sri Krishna, and the whole plot is drawn up with a view to highlighting his divinity. But unlike in the Ramayana in which the divinity of Rama is extolled even at the cost of poetic propriety, Ezhuthachan shows greater restraint and a conscious awareness of dramatic unity in this work. The facility of narration, the descriptions of scenes and situations and the delineation of *rasas* and characters are seldom surpassed by any other poet composing in Malayalam. The couplets evoke far more meanings than their words symbolise, emotions burst forth spontaneously and the verse shows an overwhelming quality thanks to its directness and simplicity. The departure of Sakuntala from Kanwa's hermitage is one of those countless situations which exemplify his ability to soar into the high realms of poetic eloquence, his certain mastery over the language, and his knowledge of the human heart:

Woe-begone and disconsolate
at parting from her sire, the sage,
and wiping off the tears which came
trickling down her high rich breasts
and offering him her obeisance
with folded hands, and with her son
circumambulating him,
and bidding farewell with smothered words,
Sakuntala rose to leave.
And then the sage took on his lap
her son and hugged him rapturously
and kissing his head many times, he blessed:
"Long be thy life and goodness infinite!"
And wishing him well in many more ways
he chanted benisons with ritual pots;
and when slowly his hands caressed
his daughter and he said, "Be thou happy!"
tears streamed from his eyes, his heart
shed its ascetic severity;
sighs rose freely and distressing thoughts
rocked his bosom: in short, the sage
was swamped with human sympathies
and felt within his inmost being
an agony born of affection.

Ezhuthachan is perfectly at home with all the *rasas*, so profound is his understanding of the emotions which stir the human frame. In regard to the heroic, he had one additional advantage: he lived at a time in the history of Kerala when war-cries rent its air day and night, and the martial art was a highly cultivated one. Therefore the many scenes of war which he has painted bear the stamp of authenticity, and if they are coloured by traces of the martial art as practised in Kerala also, we might as well excuse him, for he wrote for a people who would prefer to have it that way

It is his intuitive cognition of the circumstances of the tale, an almost direct experience of them, that imparts to his version of the Mahabharata a significance outside the pale of religion. He found in it an allegory of the eternal theme of humanity, and when he chose to sing of the joys and sorrows,

the quarrels and reconciliations of the puranic characters, he was actually singing of the eternal verities of life which know not any limitations of time or place. Thus the remoteness of the purana in point of time or place was no remoteness to him, for his imagination could transcend it easily and get at the ultimate realities. It is exactly because of this exposition of the permanent values of life which he got at intuitively, and the abundant humanity with which he spiced it, that his works, like those of his confrères in other lands, have for the Malayalis an eternal message and an eternal beauty. In regard to his humanity, it is no exercise in poetic imagination, it is taken from the raw material of life itself, in all its richness and variety. The pathos which suffuses circumstances like the departure of Sakuntala from Kanwa's *asrama*, the lament of Gandhari over the dead bodies of her sons, the love that lights up the countenance of Sita as she enters the *swayamvara* hall, of Arjuna and Subhadra in their trysts and of Sarmishta as she awaits her lord, the splendour that is in the description of the childhood of Rama and his brothers and the tenderness of Kausalya's maternal heart—surely none of these is a worn-out or obliterated picture of times bygone, everyone of these is of the pith and marrow of life. It is because of this touch of authenticity and sincerity which characterises all his portrayals that, with all his asceticism, Ezhuthachan is an eternal delight.

We said earlier that he is equally at home in all the *rasas*. Given below are a few lines taken at random which, though shorn of their original melody, could still indicate that he is no stranger to *sringara* or *vira* or *karuna*. In the days of his youth, when blood coursed warm within, Pandu roams the woods with his consorts, Kunti and Madri:

> Like to a tusker, young and proud,
> flanked with a pair of mates,
> obsessed was he with hot passions;
> and Kunti and Madri, ebullient with youth,
> beheld their lord, so like the god
> who wields the shafts of lotus blooms,
> and armed with quiver, an arm resting
> ready on arrows, the other holding
> the blade which glowed so mortally;

and seeing him thus were overcome
with flights of darts by Kama sped.
. . . . . .
Rapturously were bears sporting
biting each other, and amorously
were elephant bulls their cows hugging
and boars their females holding
in deep embrace, and birds dallying
with their mates: and excited thus,
the charmers with the flowing tresses
caressed their lord, and in the forests
lived in bliss, and seeing this
Kama laughed his heartiest laughter.
The koëls were cooing the *panchama*,
drunk with nectar of mango blooms,
and beetles were humming and flirting round
the flowers they came by and clung to them
in bewildered joy, inebriate
with the nectareal carousals.
And seeing such sights the concupiscence
of the youthful brides was enkindled:
Drinking from lips which glowed with love
and indulging long in amorous sports,
eyelids winking in ecstasies
and foaming again with passions, climbing
the mountains and on the bosom of rocks,
on beds of loveliest blossoms lying
wafted to realms of ineffable bliss. . . .

So runs the description. Surely none can say that it is an effluence from the pen of a dried-up ascetic living apart in the realms of philosophic introspection.

That he was a past-master in *vira rasa* is exemplified by his descriptions of the duels between Bali and Sugriva, Bhima and Duryodhana, Arjuna and Karna. Bhima's truculence in his dealings with the fallen Duryodhana is the subject of the following extract:

> He stood astride and grabbed his feet
> and tramped on them, and then firmly

mounted himself on him, and when
unnumbered *devas* and men looked on
he took his sword and split his breast
and with his nails did break his bones
and crushed and pulverised them to naught
and guzzled the hot red gushing blood
which like a mighty torrent rose,
and roared, and lying prone on him
filled his mouth with all that blood
that surged again like rising floods
and pulling out his entrails decked
his neck in them as with garlands
and stamped and raised dense clouds of dust
and whacked his thighs and rocked the earth.

It was a gruesome sight which greeted Gandhari as she entered the field of battle: it was strewn with the corpses of her hundred sons and hundreds of her kinsfolk, mowed down during the fierce battle which had gone on for many days. And the words which the poet puts in the mouth of that mother are indeed eloquent of the sorrow that a mother alone can feel on the total annihilation of all her children. Addressing Krishna she laments:

Mowed down upon the earth and bathed
in blood, he lies, my lord! alas!
It's he, so tender and fair and brave,
glorious like an emerald stone—
the famous Arjuna's dearest son
and lord of Gopis, nephew thine!
Why didst thou not prevent his death?
but ah, in killing lies thy joy!
. . . . . .
Alas! and here beyond him lies
my handsome son Dussasana:
How can I, my dearest child,
take thy sight, thy tattered breast
torn by Bhima to drink thy blood!
Indeed how happened that thou shouldst
meet me such a measure, Krishna?

A fire, oh God! consumes my heart
and will the tears that broke today
and my sorrow ever cease!

The lament waxes in the intensity of agony, step by step, and when she comes upon the remains of her first-born, Duryodhana, her emotions, like the waves of the sea flooding over its shores, burst out from her motherly heart:

"My child, my son, my Duryodhana,
why shouldst thou so early leave
thy mother and thy loving sire?
thy golden crown and fineries,
thy glory like the lord of gods,
thy charms, so many and majestic?
It breaks my heart, my child, thy sight—
art thou who lay on silken beds
to lie in gore—it came to this,
beaten and your limbs broken
by Bhima in his fearful rage?
I can't take it, God! I can't!"
So lamenting Gandhari
ran, fell down and rolled in dust
and fainted: and then suddenly
rising, spoke in agony....

Hardly ever has Ezhuthachan failed to depict a *rasa* or a situation to the fullest possibilities of his medium. But, however, it is in expounding the more fundamental questions of life—in which all his works abound—that he takes a particular delight, and his verse, as in the following instance, assumes an aphoristic quality:

The living delight in their ego
of having the body and vainly think,
"I am a Brahmin, a noble, a king!"
And then one day, in the season of joy,
crunched up and cast off by beasts of prey
or consumed by flames and to ashes turned
or transformed to worms in the earth's bowels

the fact of the body ceases to be:
It's far from good, this flesh-bound ego.

Though matters pertaining to the spirit find a deliberate importance in the works of Ezhuthachan, yet in the Mahabharatha especially, the ethics of material existence are propounded in considerable detail. The ultimate goal he had in mind was a harmonious blending of the spiritual with the material and the patterning of life in its highest perfections. It is no easy matter to reconcile convincingly the nobler ideas of the spirit with the inescapable realities of life—a task which an exclusively spiritualistic or materialistic poet could hardly realise—but Ezhuthachan, with his infinite sympathies, could strike a happy balance between the two and tell his compatriots that, in the final analysis, there is no basic contradiction between them.

The transformation which the works of Ezhuthachan effected in the cultural life of Kerala during the last three centuries and more is indeed phenomenal. More than anything else, they provide for the majority of Malayalis the fabric on which to build their lives. No poet, ancient or modern, is read so widely as he, and no other works have run into as many editions as his. It is deemed indispensable for every household to have a set of his works and, naturally enough, the constant reading of them has left indelible impressions in the very core of their culture as a people.

Ezhuthachan is credited with the authorship of many more works, but nothing definite can be said of his association with the bulk of them. We can only be sure that the first nine cantos of *Bhagavatam*, *Harinamakirtanam*, *Uthararamayanam* and *Chintaratnam* are his creations. But none of these works, it has to be said, comes up to the level of the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, either as poetry or as devotional literature.

3. *Ezhuthachan's Followers: Poontanam*

The epoch ushered in by Ezhuthachan was one of devotional fervour and philosophical enquiries. And following his lead, many poets and preceptors of the succeeding genera-

tions also came forward to enrich the tradition. Towards the evening of his life he established at Chittoor in Central Kerala a *gurumadhom*, an order of preceptors, and here his disciples, some of whom were poets of considerable attainments, taught and composed even as their master did. Of the Ezhuthachans —the name was subsequently taken over as an appellation by his successors—who thus followed him, the names of Karunakaran, Suryanarayanan, Devan and Gopalan deserve mention. There is a view that the *Bhagavatam* translation which Ezhuthachan left unfinished was completed by one of his aforesaid successors. There is no unanimity of opinion, however, in regard to the authorship of *Brahmandapuranam Kilippattu*, a major work. Some scholars hold that its author was Ezhuthachan himself, while some others, that it was by Karunakaran, one of his disciples. Of the major works attributed to his successors in the *gurumadhom*, *Skandapuranam*, *Sivaratri Mahatmyam* and *Vedantasaram* are the more important. Quite a wealth of devotional literature was produced anonymously also during this period, *Vetalacharitam*, *Naganandam*, *Krishnalila* and *Ekadasi Mahatmyam* being the major works. That the influence of Ezhuthachan pervaded the entire poetic activity of that era is amply illustrated by these anonymous productions.

Yet another representative of the age of devotional and didactic poetry is Poontanam Nambutiri, author of *Bhasha Karnamrutam*, *Jnana Pana* and *Kumaraharanam Pana*. His contribution to Malayalam literature is in no way comparable to Ezhuthachan's, either quantitatively or qualitatively, but the sheer candour and mellifluousness of his works have gained for him a high place in the literature of Kerala. He was not a scholar, nor is his verse free from defects, yet his devotional fervour and an almost child-like naiveté which often takes on the glow of genuine poetry are more than adequate compensation for any shortcomings. His only child dies, and he is disconsolate. Yet he is consoled, for,

> Why need one have other children
> when little Krishna plays in his heart?

These lines are from *Jnana Pana*,—'Song of Knowledge'—a

long philosophic poem inspired by his bereavement. He meditates at length on the destiny of man, on the illusory nature of the universe and on the *lila* of the Supreme Being:

> What had happened till yesterday
> and what will happen tomorrow
> I know not, nor when this body
> seen today, will cease to be.
> He Thou art Who turns to naught
> those who were the moment before,
> sets a man on palanquins
> in a couple of days or four
> and makes the king who dwelt in palaces
> bundles on the shoulders bear.

Bhasha Karnamrutam is a *stotra* and is composed in quatrains while *Jnana Pana* and *Kumaraharanam Pana*, his more important works, are set in the indigenous musical metres. *Kumaraharanam* has a puranic episode for its theme—the recovery, by Arjuna and Krishna, of a Brahmin's lost children—and some of its passages, such as the description of Vaikuntam, are so beautiful that one is no longer in doubt about its author's lyrical ability.

While discussing a literary epoch noted for its devotional and didactic poetry, it would be necessary to touch upon the innumerable hymns and lyrics produced by anonymous devotees also. Viewed as pure literature their intrinsic worth is not much, but the fact that they represent the popular trend of a certain epoch in the literary history of Kerala deserves special notice. The spirit that animates these compositions, most of which were composed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is that of Ezhuthachan who showed the way, and any deficiencies they evince as literature are more than made up for by the sincerity of their composers and the intimations of the beatific which they contain. They have served to foster in the Malayalis a sense of the moral and the spiritual through the years, and no wonder pious people still chant them at eventide as an indispensable religious rite.

CHAPTER VII

EARLY PROSE LITERATURE

1. *Beginnings*

That there were expressive prose styles in Malayalam since early times is established by existing specimens, but prose, as a rule, was very little employed for literary purposes until about the tenth century A.D. The fragments in the light of which we could form a fair idea of those ancient styles are the inscriptions on rocks and copper-plates and documents in palmyra leaves. There is, in all of them, a generous admixture of either Tamil or Sanskrit, depending on the period of their composition, and of dialects and provincialisms; there is nothing much literary about them, their expressiveness withal is what makes them remarkable.

The first major work in prose which has some claim to be classified as literature is *Kautiliyam*, a hermeneutic version in Malayalam of the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya. The date of the work cannot be ascertained with any exactitude, but scholars like Ullur Parameswara Iyer believe, in the light of its linguistic features, that it was written somewhere between the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. when the Chera kings were still in power. The sentences are short and simple, the inflexions are much the same as what we have today, and the language shows a unique plastic quality. Chentamil, it would seem, was still the prevailing literary medium of the day and Sanskrit had only begun to contribute its vocabulary. Thus we find a certain measure of Tamil usages in the work, but that could not detract from it its essentially Malayalam features. It is on the whole a fine specimen of ancient prose, and the fact that it treats with the utmost clarity a technical subject like public finance might well be taken as a pointer to the strength and expressiveness of the language.

The prose of the *attaprakaras* and the *kramadipikas* illustrates further the directness and simplicity of the old style. As has already been mentioned, these works deal with the

theory and practice of Koodiyattam, the indigenous dance-drama. The style has a distinct literary flavour, and the vocabulary is rich enough to permit the exposition of all the technicalities of the art-form. Of the *attaprakaras* discovered so far, the more significant are *Surpanakhankam* and *Mathavilasam*.

There are, of course, many imperfections in the old prose when we judge it by modern standards, but if clarity, precision, an evocative capacity and an over-all euphonic quality are any attributes to the merits of a style, then the old prose had them in a fairly generous measure.

The declamations used by Nambutiris in the Sanghakkali would be a good illustration, but as it is, the broad sense of the sentences alone, and not their style or euphonic values, could be expressed in a different medium:

> ...Swirl the sabre; raise (reflect) the sun at its point; a breast-splitter (the sabre proves) when thrust (at the opponent); throw him (the opponent) out of the *kalari* (military gymnasium) like an *ammana* ('ball-tripping-dance') ball if (he) comes close enough; (and when) struck at the right if the two halves (thus halved by the blow) differ in weight by the smallest fraction when weighed in the silver stick (balance) of Palakkattusseri Ittunnirama Tarakan, then the blow is not a blow, the thrust is not a thrust, he (the fencer) won't walk in Malanad (Kerala)....

The practice of employing prose for literary purposes was not altogether unknown in the early centuries. In fact many puranas like *Brahmandapuranam*, *Bhagavatam* and *Ramayanam* were retold in prose at least five hundred years ago. *Nalopakhyanam*, *Ambarishopakhyanam* and *Devimahatmyam* are also fine specimens of the ancient prose literature in Malayalam.[1] All these works are the products of an age when Chentamil was still a force and Sanskrit, the language of the puranas, had begun to exert its influence in literary circles. Thus it would seem that prose also was a recognised literary form in

[1] Published by the Manuscripts Library, Travancore (Kerala) University.

ancient literature. The one reason why it could not develop as much as verse was the convention that the puranic tales might better be retold in the latter form.

There are instances of the old prose rising to levels of noble eloquence. A good instance would be the *Kundara Proclamation* of Velu Tampi[1]. Though, in point of time, it cannot be described as old—it was composed in the early years of the nineteenth century—it shows that the traditional style, as unaffected by western models, also was capable of conveying a sense of power and persuasion. The one defect of the old style was that it tended to be formal. The earliest specimens are simple and plastic enough; the later ones, however, give the impression of lacking in spontaneity. It is a heavily ornamented prose, and not infrequently sprawling. The reason might well be that until about the last century the writing of prose was seldom resorted to for purposes of social intercourse. It was the influence of the West, particularly the rapid spread of English education, which contributed to simplifying the traditional style and imparting to it its present pattern and expressive qualities.

2. *Christian Missionaries and Malayalam Literature*

From time immemorial, Kerala had its contacts with Europe, but it was the landing of Vasco da Gama at Kappat near Calicut in A.D. 1498 which opened up the land to the free flow of Western culture. It was trade which brought the Portuguese here, but eventually they could meddle with the internal affairs of its kingdoms and cherish hopes of imperialistic expansion. And when the Dutch too made their appearance, clashes between the traders themselves and rivalries and wars among the native kingdoms, abetted and actively supported by them, became the order of the day. But all that is history now, and hardly have the politics of those days and the fortunes of those princes left any mark

[1] Velu Tampi, a Dewan of Travancore, was among the earliest patriots of Kerala to rise in arms against the British. He issued a proclamation from Kundara, in Central Travancore, inciting the people to throw the foreigners out of the State. His movement was quelled by the superior might of the British and eventually he committed suicide.

on later generations. However, there was one circumstance which made an indelible impress on Kerala, and that was the missionary activities sponsored by the Portuguese. Kerala had a Christian community of its own since, as is believed, the first century A.D., but it was the Portuguese who set about the propagation of their faith with unreserved zeal and a deliberate method. The new faith brought about many radical changes in the cultural pattern of the society, and in regard to its literature, it ushered in the age of printing and exerted a beneficent influence on its prose.

With a view to teaching and propagating the Catholic faith, the Jesuit missionaries established seminaries after Western models at various places in Kerala. Besides being religious centres where the doctrine was taught, these seminaries were sound educational institutions also. Thanks to them, a section of the community became familiar with languages like Portuguese, Latin and Syriac and the cultures conveyed by those languages. By the end of the sixteenth century there were thus three major seminaries in Kerala—at Kodungalloor, Chennamangalam and the island-fort of Vypeen. The divines who taught at these seminaries were efficient linguists as well, and in due course they could include in the curriculum of their students exhaustive studies in the language and literature of Kerala also. The result was the assimilation by many young men of the major features of both oriental and occidental cultures and a certain indirect transformation of their language and literature in the light of this new learning.

It was the quest after knowledge, and a certain degree of curiosity too, which enthused the missionaries to undertake major studies in the cultural aspects of Kerala. Familiarity with the language of the people was necessary to facilitate their missionary activities also. The eventual outcome of their mastery of the native speech was that they, together with their disciples, began to contribute in no small measure towards the enrichment of Malayalam. Their productions were in a new style, composed largely after Western models, and from here begins, one might say, the story of European influence on the literature of Kerala.

The major feature of this new style was a simplified syntax

for Malayalam prose. The traditional style tended to be somewhat ponderous for any effective intercourse with the common people through the written medium, for it lacked in directness and intelligibility. But the new style, devised primarily for the propagation of the faith, was easy enough to understand because it was both simple and corresponded more closely to the language as spoken. The earliest ecclesiastical writings in the new style like the *Vedasaram* prove this radical change in the writing of prose.

The activities of the missionaries brought in yet another circumstance which was bound to assist in the dissemination of literacy and literature, to wit, the printing press. Though primarily meant for the printing of religious texts, the innovation was freely used for the education of the masses. In Europe, the Jesuit priests were expert printers, and naturally they gave high priority to the production of books in Kerala also. The first press to be established in the region was at the Ambazhakkad Seminary in the Cochin area in A.D. 1563. The priests who taught at that seminary were genuinely interested in the indigenous languages, in Tamil and Sanskrit especially, and in a short while they collected a good many works in Sanskrit, mastered the language and its literature with the help of the local Nambutiris and compiled and printed a grammar and a dictionary in Malayalam. By 1580, two more presses were established, one at Vypeen Fort and the other at Cochin. The first books to be printed in these presses by the Portuguese missionaries also were on religion. There was a lapse of many years before further printing of Malayalam works was undertaken, but a beginning was already made and that signalled a new epoch in the literary history of Kerala.

It would be necessary to refer to many names when we consider the contributions of European missionaries to Malayalam literature. In this survey, however, we shall speak of only two of them, Father Arnos and Father Paulinus. Father Arnos came to the Ambazhakkad Seminary in A.D., 1700 mastered Malayalam and Sanskrit in a very short while and gained a thorough insight into the customs and manners of the people. He was a good conversationalist in Malayalam, and it is said that he wrote a grammar and a dictionary for the use of his colleagues. These works, however, are not

extant. But his claim to be remembered in the annals of Malayalam literature rests on his being a poet who composed for the Malayalis. He wrote many long poems like *Chaturantyam Parvam* and *Messiha Charitram*, all on Christian themes, and though they are not of any high poetic quality, they yet speak much for his attainments as a master of Malayalam. Incidentally, his works reveal the unmistakable imprint of the idioms of Ezhuthachan, Poontanam and other poets of the immediately preceding age.

Father Paulinus *alias* Fra Bartalomeo was another Jesuit missionary who took a lively interest in oriental culture. A contemporary of Maharaja Marthanda Varma and Maharaja Dharma Raja of Travancore who flourished in the latter half of the eighteenth century, he was seen frequently at their capitals, Trivandrum and Padmanabhapuram, and was much in their company too. He records in his *Travels Through the East Indies* that he wrote for Dharma Raja a grammar in Malayalam explaining the features of Latin and English. He wrote many works in Latin on the cultural features of Kerala and in one of them he traces the geneology of Azhuvancheri Tamprakkal, the premier Nambutiri family of Kerala. He was an artist too as is instanced by the fact that he painted a portrait of the Tamprakkal of his time for inclusion in his account of the geneology of that family[1].

3. *Vartamana Pustakam, the First Travelogue*

We may now turn to the contributions of the native Christians who came under the influence of the Portuguese missionaries. Two names deserve special mention in this context—Kariyattil Ouseph Malpan and Parammakkal Thoma Kathanar, both of whom lived in the second half of the eighteenth century. Uncommonly proficient in Latin and Portuguese, they wrote several prose works in Malayalam after the Western models.

Vedatarkkam—'Logic of Religion'—of Malpan would seem to be the first work in Malayalam prose to treat of social problems. The language is powerful and lends itself well to

[1] Dr. P. J. Thomas *The Christian Literature of Kerala*

discourses in a logical vein. *Vedatarkkam* is also the first work to be written in Malayalam on the pattern of Western prose models.

Malpan undertook a journey to Rome by about A.D. 1778 together with his chief disciple and companion Thoma Kathanar. It was a unique experience to both of them, and to Kathanar, it turned out to be the subject of the first travelogue in Malayalam, and, as it seems, one of the earliest in any Indian language—*Vartamana Pustakam* or 'Book of News'. The work is conceived from the ecclesiastical angle, but it is replete with pictures of the Western world as they occurred to the critical eyes of an inquisitive oriental traveller. The author speaks at length of his voyage through the infinite seas, the hazards which confronted him and his mates and how they were overcome, the sights he saw and the people he met and the joy and misery that is in such ramblings—all with a captivating open-heartedness. It is a very arduous and round-about trip—via the Cape of Good Hope, Brazil and Portugal—but his joy in reaching his destination, Rome, is indeed supreme. The naiveté of the narrative is so convincing that the reader cannot fail to sympathise with the fortunes of the traveller.

The marks of Western prose are clearly discernible in the work, and it evinces many qualities extremely rare in the prose of those days such as the compactness and unbroken continuity of the narrative, the division into chapters and paragraphs and the balancing of sentences. It need hardly be said that Malayalam would have been much poorer without *Vartamana Pustakam*.

CHAPTER VIII

KATHAKALI LITERATURE

1. *Origin and Evolution of Kathakali*

It often happens in the history of literature that when a master of uncommon prowess leaves the field, the void he leaves behind is never wholly filled by those who come after him. In the case of Malayalam the outstanding example is that of Ezhuthachan: none of his successors could rise to his eminence. A century later an attempt was made by Kottayathu Tampuran to compose in the traditional style a new Ramayana —after Valmiki—and though its poetry was of a high order, it failed to have any enthusiastic response from the people. *Girijakalyanam Hamsappattu* of Unnayi Varier, another eminent poet, was a similar failure.

Thus the period following Ezhuthachan was largely barren for poetry of the traditional varieties. But, paradoxically enough, it is one of the most memorable periods in the annals of Malayalam literature: it was in the seventeenth century that Kathakali, the reputed dance-drama of Kerala, took its present form and enriched thereby the literature of the people. Kathakali is not the creation of any single individual, nor did it come into being all on a sudden. It grew out of the many existing art-forms and crystallised into the present shape after undergoing transformations at the hands of many masters and the fashions of their time. It is obvious that it has drawn much of its substance from Koodiyattam, the earlier dance-drama which, in turn, had taken its clue from the still older art-forms like the Mudiyettu, the Tirayattam and the Kolam Tullal, all of which are costume-dances with a ritualistic significance. It has also borrowed from the popular entertainments of the community like the Patayani and the Velakali, both of which are martial in tone, and from the Kalari Payattu, the traditional fencing system.

Yet another factor which contributed to the flowering of the Kathakali was the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva. There were, since the earliest times, a good many dances and songs in

Kerala which had for their themes episodes from the puranas, and these art-forms were becoming more and more sophisticated with the evolution of society. It was then that the *Gita Govinda* made its appearance and captivated the aesthetic sense of the people with its melody and its poetry. The first to exploit the possibilities of this work were the Chakyars, the professional actors of Kerala, and before long the dancing of *ashtapadis*, the *padas* of the work, became a popular and polished entertainment of the community. The next step towards evolving the Kathakali was taken by Manaveda Raja, a Zamorin of Calicut who, enchanted by the *ashtapadi* dance, composed the *Krishna-Giti* in imitation of the *Gita Govinda* and set it to the dance form called the Krishnanattam.

The Krishnanattam, though still present in its original form, had many limitations which impeded its popularity with the people. The songs of *Krishna Giti* composed after the manner of *ashtapadis* were in Sanskrit, and naturally the meaning of the songs remained unintelligible to the majority. There was hardly any room in it for the exposition of *rasas* like the *vira* (heroic), the *roudra* (the terrible) or the *karuna* (the compassionate) which the audience would like to see on the stage. And moreover there was not enough music in it, vocal or instrumental, of a rich and resonant type. Therefore a new dance was evolved, combining all those ingredients which could win the favour of the audience—and that was the Ramanattam.

The Ramanattam was undoubtedly an improvement on the Krishnanattam insofar as the linking narrations were in Manipravala *slokas*. The songs were in Malayalam, acting was more scientific, the *rasas* covered a very wide field and the stories themselves were conceived with a view to upholding *dharma* against *adharma*, right against wrong. To Kottarakkara Tampuran is due the credit for evolving it, and he had reason to be satisfied, for it found an immediate welcome from the people

But there had still to be many further reformations before the Ramanattam could become Kathakali: Vettathu Raja, Kalladikkottu Nambutiri and Kaplingattu Nambutiri had to reform the costumes and systematise the *mudras* and movements in the dancing and Kottayathu Tampuran had to

establish by his own example that the works composed for the dance should have the highest literary qualities. He composed four stories based on the Mahabharata—*Baka Vadham*, *Kalyanasougandhikam*, *Krimmira Vadham* and *Kalakeya Vadham*—and with these works to begin with, the dance-drama took the name of 'Kathakali', meaning literally 'story-play' and provided generations of poets a literary form calling for the full exercise of their genius.

2. *The Structure of Kathakali*

With Kottayathu Tampuran, the technical features of Kathakali were brought to its present perfection and the convention was established that the works composed for the same should be of a high literary standard. Each work is divided into so many sequences and each sequence is introduced with a narrative quatrain either in Sanskrit or in Manipravala with a view to giving continuity to the story. The *padas* or songs are in Malayalam, and sung in classical modes by musicians. They are translated into *mudras* (hand-symbols) and movements by the dancers who are invariably men. There is not much to call stage-property: a huge *nila vilakku*, a standing oil lamp, illumines the stage and the actors with its dazzling light, and a curtain held up by two men marks the beginning and end of each sequence. There are two musicians, one to lead and the other to follow in the rendering of the songs, and four instrumentalists to accompany on the *maddalam*, the *chenda* (both drums), the *ilathalam* (a pair of cymbals) and the *chengala* (a circular metal plate sounded with a stick to mark the *tala* or time-measure). Costumes are symbolic of the essential nature of each of the puranic characters who figure in the story. Thus *pachcha* or the 'green-costume' is indicative of a character's nobility, *kathi* or the 'knife-costume', of the *asuric*, *kari* or 'carbon-black-costume', of hunters etc., *tadi* or 'beard-costume', of wicked and monstrous ones, and *minukku* or 'polished costume', of women, sanyasins, Brahmins, etc. The *chuttikuthu* or 'putting on the spots', that is to say, designing the pattern of the face with paints and pastes is an extremely intricate job and begins hours before a performance.

Kathakali is neither simply a *natya*, acting, nor exclusively a *nritta*, dancing. It may be apter to describe it as a *nritya*, a combination of acting, dancing and music. The performer who is both a dancer and an actor has to translate into the language of *mudras* or gestures and movements the import of the *padas* sung from behind him almost word by word and decorate this translation with facial expressions, movements of the eye-balls, bodily movements, etc. He has to be silent throughout but his silence has got to be more expressive than the best of eloquence.

In Kathakali there is *nritya*, there is music, there is literature and, above all, there are the nine *rasas* known to Indian aesthetics. It is such an elaborate art that to become a Kathakali performer calls for years of intensive and arduous training. There is, first of all, the exacting demands on his body: it should be supple and strong and should not have any suggestion of the bone in it so that it could meet all the requirements of every posture demanded by the story, and dance the live-long night without any show of fatigue. The training undertaken to this end starts from early boyhood and the system which the novice adopts is much the same as that of the old *kalaries*, the military gymnasia, where martial arts were taught. But physical culture is only one aspect, nor is it the most important. That he has got to be an artist is the most vital thing: he must be sensitive to the theme and the poetry of the story, he must translate the *padas* into the gesture-language flawlessly and with the utmost poise and grace, he must be learned enough to understand the text of the *slokas* and the *padas*, and above all he must have abundant *mano-dharma*, that is, an intuitive apprehension of the role he has to enact so that he could beautify it with his improvisations and impart to it the stamp of his personality.

After its hey-day in the eighteenth and the early decades of the nineteenth centuries Kathakali had to brave a long period of neglect due to an unfortunate conspiracy of circumstances. There is, first of all, its artistic conventions and stylised techniques which make it unintelligible to the masses. It needs some kind of an initiation into the art before one could appreciate it fully, and the patience and leisure required for the same were not forthcoming. The spread of modern

education with its accent on emulating the English in customs and manners and even in the appreciation of art-forms persuaded the educated classes to frown upon, to ignore at least, what is native. And to top it all, there was the steady decline in the economic status of the aristocracy which had been organising and patronising Kathakali troupes and preserving the art as a living force all through the centuries.

But of late there has been a renaissance of the art thanks to the yeoman service rendered to it by the Kerala Kala Mandalam, an institution founded three decades ago by the late Mahakavi Vallathol for the teaching and the popularisation of the indigenous arts of Kerala. The untiring efforts of the Mahakavi and his institution have now won for Kathakali an audience not only in Kerala or India but even beyond the seas—in Europe, in America and in the East Asian countries. This universal acclaim is not an ephemeral enthusiasm born of propaganda or the novelty of the art-form but, by all accounts, a genuine one based on the recognition of its intrinsic worth as an art-form. Of course it may not be easy for non-Malayalis to understand or enjoy its many charms fully, it being rooted in the language and traditions of Kerala, but it has that transcendent merit of all noble art-forms which defies the barriers of time and territory and makes a direct appeal to the aesthetic sense of a receptive audience. Moreover, the gesture-language is the most universal of languages, and in Kathakali it has been brought to such a perfection that no verbal eloquence can excel it. It is thus a significant contribution which Kerala has made to the world of art through its Kathakali.

3. *Kottayathu Tampuran and Unnayi Varier*

We have already seen that it was Kottayathu Tampuran who won for Kathakali works the status of literature. That he was a poet and could handle Malayalam and Sanskrit with equal facility is borne out by every one of his works which still find a place in the repertoire of most Kathakali troupes. And his fame as an actor is indeed legendary. Of the four works he composed the *Kalakeya Vadham* is perhaps the most important from the literary as well as the performers'

points of view. It would seem as though when he introduces Urvasi, comparing her to Poetry, he is indicating the main features of his own verse:

Sulalita pada vinyasa
Ruchiralankarasalini madhura
Mrudulapi gahana bhava
Suktirivapa sorvasivijayam

The above quatrain in Sanskrit—an instance of the figure of speech called *sleshopama* (simile resulting from the plural meanings of words) conveys two meanings: one, as qualifying Urvasi, the heroine of the work, and the other, her *upamana* (that to which one is compared), namely Poetry. In the line-by-line translation given below, the bracketed passages relate to the latter:

Graceful in the movements of her feet
(Set in the choicest of simple words),
decked with lovely ornaments, and sweet,
(bejewelled with figures of speech, and sweet),
and tender, (though) majestic in her poise,
(breathing a gentle melody, (and) with meanings full),
Urvasi (who is) like Poetry, attained Vijayan.

The *slokas*, as a rule, are in Sanskrit and the *padas*, in choice Malayalam. The verse breathes a haunting melody in both media:

Kale kadachidatha kamijananukule
Maleya maruta vilolita malatike
Lilarasena vicharan vipine vinoda
Lolam samiranasuto ramanimabhanil

Once in the season which lovers inflame,
even the spring, the Son of Air,
rapt in delights, in the jasmine bowers
which breeze from the Malay hills gently swayed,

and sporting along the lonely woods,
spoke to his charmer (to this effect).

The melody of the *padas* in Malayalam makes them eminently singable:

Kichakamita kuzhalutunnu; pikagita visheshamotiha chernu
hrudi soochita modamotiha ninnu chila vallika natikal
vayu sanchalita pallavangulibhirabhinayikkunnu

The bamboos are piping
mingling with the music of the koels;
the dancing girls—the tender vines—
are dancing with a heart-felt joy
with graceful fingers—the budding leaves,
swaying in the gentle breeze.

A popular epithet used in describing the idiom of Kottayathu Tampuran is *madhura komala kanta*, that is, sweet, lovely and luminous. The inspiration his works had for his successors is indeed considerable.

The growth of Kathakali literature was rapid. Fascinated as much by its form as literature as by the art for which it provides the pattern, a good number of poets came forward with their *attakkathas*, that is, 'stories for dancing'. It is not that all those productions were uniformly good: some were fine specimens of literature but were unfit for dancing or were poor as musical compositions. Only a few there are which reveal a happy synthesis of choreographic, literary and musical qualities; and of all of them the most outstanding is *Nalacharitam* of Unnayi Varier.

Unnayi Varier did not compose much. His only other work is *Girijakalyanam Hamsappattu*, which, as has already been observed, was not much of a success. But he ranks among the foremost of Kerala's poets, for he is the author of *Nalacharitam*, a work which is as much honoured in the history of Malayalam poetry as it is in the repertoire of Kathakali.

We do not know much about the circumstances of the poet's life, nor when he lived. All that is still a subject of controversy. We can only say that he lived either towards

the end of the seventeenth century or the beginning of the eighteenth, that he resided either permanently or occasionally at Trivandrum and that he had the patronage of Maharaja Kartika Tirunal *alias* Dharma Raja of Travancore. There is also the view that he earned his livelihood by the *kazhakam* profession traditional to the Varier community, that is, by making garlands, preparing offerings etc. for temple rituals, and that he was associated with the Koodalmanikyam temple at Irinjalakkuda in the Cochin area. But whatever be the circumstances of his life, there is no doubt that he was an uncommon genius and that his contribution is the best of its kind.

An outstanding feature of *Nalacharitam*, and rather an unusual one for *attakkathas*, is that it is a drama in the full sense of the term. The plot is woven with such supreme artistry and the characters drawn with such insight into human nature that one is prone to think that had its author taken to writing dramas in the conventional sense he could easily have made for himself a name comparable to the greatest in dramaturgy. In fact there are such brilliant strokes of the playwright's art in it that one is often reminded of masters like Shakespeare. It is not through the magic of the verse, nor through the evocative potentialities of his diction that he achieves his effects, it is through the organic build-up of his plot, the masterly presentation of motives, conflicts and consequences and the inevitability of the denouement. True, the story is a familiar one and it embodies many situations which permit of life being portrayed in all its depth and vastness, but that by itself could hardly ensure the success of a work if the poet would not breathe into it his spirit and garnish it with his art. The secret of Unnayi Varier's success lies in this, that he has consolidated the sprawling story into an organic and unified whole, animated it with his deep humanity and clothed it with his glorious poetry. The rejection of all the incidental episodes which detract from the even flow of the story and the concentration on the critical turns impart to the plot brevity and intensity; the pathos which the plot could hold is underlined with his vast sympathies; and the idiom is so contrived that each word takes on an emotive glow which enhances the poignancy of the context in which it is used. It would seem as though that Varier has lavished much

thought in the choice of his words: they take on a rare jewel-like quality. Their appropriateness and tone-values enable him to achieve with one word what another poet could hardly achieve with a line: maximum expression with the minimum means would seem to be his motto.

With all the paring off of the superfluous and the extrinsic, the work still remains a big one. Divided into four parts, each part is adequate enough to last a dusk-to-dawn performance.

The delineation of the characters serves a two-fold purpose: one, the natural function of contributing to the strength of the plot and the indispensability of the denouement, and the other, as the symbols of the poet's views and philosophy of life. It cannot be said that the same are the functions which the other poets who composed in Malayalam, the composers of the *attakkathas* especially, have set for their characters. In fact, with the exception of the Kannassans, Cherusseri and Ezhuthachan, the majority of them have never bothered to use a mould different from that of the puranas. *Nalacharitam* is refreshingly unique in this respect, that its plot and characters, while meeting every demand of the drama, serve also as a frame-work for the exposition of the verities of life as their creator saw them—the motives, emotions and aspirations which animate man, his pains and pleasures, the epic grandeur of his life and his ultimate destiny. *Nalacharitam* is thus a vision of life in all its plenitude, pathos and sublimity.

One other salient feature which distinguishes Varier's work from most others on the same theme is the warmth of living which courses through the veins of his characters. The reader feels as though he is in the company of the quick and not the stiff, formal and non-human creations of a strained or fantasy-loving imagination. A good instance would be Damayanti. Hers is a portrait which countless artists have painted in a variety of colours and perspectives and, of course, each is charming in its own way. But to see her in her manifold glories—as virgin, bride and wife; tender, beautiful and invincible—perhaps one ought to approach Varier's heroine. The secret of the liveliness of his creations would seem to be his complete identification with them. It is not for his commentary on the deeper questions of life alone that he appro-

aches them—in that case *Nalacharitam* would hardly be the popular work it is—it is as an artist as well, an artist who delights in the rich variety of life and loves to paint every minute detail with loving care and consummate artistry. Thus a restless tenderness envelops the scenes in which Nala and Damayanti pour forth their hearts to their messenger, the swan, and an ethereal halo curtains them off when, as bride and bridegroom, they come together in the rapturous honeymoon scene. And whatever be the end that awaited the hunter who saved Damayanti in the woods and then lost his head over her charms, certainly his sense of beauty as expressed in his inimitably naive phrase is an admirable phenomenon which, as the poet would seem to tell us, is innate to human nature. The same delight in the sensations, dreams and passions which the human heart is capable of permeates the work as a kind of backdrop to the pathos which dominates the theme.

Thus there is no *kavya* in all the repertoire of Kathakali which is charged so much with the pulse of life. Nor are there many which approach it in the melody of its *padas*. The words are the choicest and are invariably assonanced, the inflections seldom obtrude the even flow of the lines and the *ragas* in which the *padas* are set and their *talas* are appropriate to the moods of the situations. When all these elements combine in concordant proportions we get a poetry which soars occasionally into the raptures of lyricism or delves deep into the profound mysteries of life or flow on quietly over the vast expanses of life murmuring sweetly of the beauty and pathos of things it comes by.

It is extremely difficult to convey the feel of the *padas* in a different medium, for they derive their significance from the jewel-like quality of the words, the cadence of the lines and the euphonic devices which enhance their emotive quality. Moreover, there is no single *pada* which stands by itself as conveying an idea, everyone is but a tributary which adds up to the cumulative whole. However the broad sense of two *padas* is given below: the first, a cogitation of Nala as he wanders in the forest and the second, a somnambulistic soliloquy of his during his stay *incognito* in the court of Rituparna. Exiled from his kingdom and separated from his wife, the

disconsolate Nala finds an imagined peace in the wilderness which to him now is better than the city he has left behind.

All the seven worlds, ghastly wilds,
the wild itself, a boon city.

Policies, successes, fears and expenses
concern but only the rulers of men.
Straight are the caves and therein live
monstrous beasts of prey;
but what they feel, they give vent to,
(and one can take them somewhere,
whereas) mysterious are the foes—
the mortal passions confronting him.
Refrain: All the seven worlds...

And here are lovely habitations
where wise innocence finds its home
delightful, rich with water, and rocks
strewn about, and motherly streams
caressing, and the splendid trees
reigning like kings: it's rapturous here.
Refrain: All the seven worlds...

Reparable are all the woes
evils prove evanescent,
and sins have ceased their cruel sting
thanks to the many mercies which Fate
has (of late) been showering:
all my griefs have ceased to be.
Refrain: All the seven worlds...

The *pada* given below is a lament of Nala for his beloved whom he left behind in the forest. The scene is the court of Rituparna where he lives as a charioteer and the time, the dead of night. The soliloquy, profusely punctuated with heart-rending exclamations and endearing epithets, flows forth from his lips without himself being aware of it: he is in a somnambulant state:

Alas! alone in the lonely woods,
waking up and woe-begone
what indeed couldst thou have done,
my love, my moon-faced, timid one?

Hast thou gained some sanctuary,
some home of near and dear ones?
When again can I behold
thy face, so like the full-blown moon,
and when again thy figure embrace
which Indra too coveted sore?

Refrain: Alas! alone...

Beloved one! what wouldst thou have
in hunger's thrall to eat?
I can't think of thee—my God!
disillusioned (in thy love
and faith in me), roaming alone
the weird wilds where jackals prowl.

Refrain: Alas! alone...

Art thou not in thy dire woe
consoled by thy disciples—
does (who practise glancing like thee)
and elephants (who thy gait copy)
and worshipped by the kingly trees
(offering thee their flowers and fruits)?

Refrain: Alas! alone...

Be it known that I've no dread
of hell, so long as Siva is kind;
think not that I have forsaken thee
nor have not been protecting thee:
Chaste thy life, thy devotion
to Vishnu and thy lord profound,
and thy observances immaculate—
won't they be to thee thy strength?[1]

Refrain: Alas! alone...

[1] There are many expressions in the *pada* which have plural connotations. For instance *chennayo* in the first stanza means 'Did you go?' as also 'wolf'.

Kathakali and its literature are what they are because Unnayi Varier composed *Nalacharitam*.

4. *The Golden Age of Kathakali*

Maharaja Kartika Tirunal of Travancore who extended his patronage to many composers, including Unnayi Varier was an ardent connoisseur of the art and was himself a composer. He wrote seven *attakkathas—Rajasuyam*, *Narakasura Vadham*, *Subhadraharanam*, *Baka Vadham*, *Gandharva Vijayam*, *Panchali Swayamvaram* and *Kalyanasougandhikam* and founded the institution of the *Kottaram Kathakali Yogam*, 'the Palace Kathakali Troupe'. He effected many reforms in acting as well as in costumes and implemented the same in respect of his palace troupe. Yet another step he took for the popularisation of Kathakali was instituting it as a permanent feature of the religious festivals of the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple, Trivandrum. The *Kottaram Kathakali Yogam* as well as the performance of Kathakali during the festival at the Trivandrum temple are in vogue to this day.

Among the courtiers of Kartika Tirunal were the most famous personalities in the history of Kathakali. Besides Unnayi Varier, there were Ittirarissa Menon, composer of *Santanagopalam*, Putiyakkal Tampan who wrote *Kartaviryarjuna Vijayam* and the younger brother of the Maharaja, Aswati Tirunal, author of *Ambarisha Charitam*, *Pootana Moksham*, *Rukmini Swayamvaram* and *Poundraka Vadham*. All these works are uniformly good and are invariably included in the repertoires of all troupes. The reign of Kartika Tirunal (1758-98) was thus a period of widespread enthusiasm for Kathakali.

Another golden age of Kathakali was during the reign of Maharaja Swati Tirunal (1824-47). An illustrious contemporary of the saint-composer Tyagaraja, Swati Tirunal ranks foremost among the composers of Carnatic Music. A scholar, a multi-linguist, an eminent poet and a discerning patron, Swati Tirunal has left behind him a wide range of outstanding musical compositions in Malayalam, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada and Hindustani. The bulk of these compositions and all his poems bear the unmistakable stamp of his supreme devotion to his family-deity, Sri Padmanabha. He did not

compose any *attakkatha*, being completely taken up with music, but he was an ardent connoisseur of the art and encouraged it in every possible way. The best musicians and composers of the age were all his courtiers and to that select group belonged two of the most famous composers of Kathakali: Irayimman Tampi (1783-1856), composer of *Uthara Swayamvaram*, *Kichaka Vadham* and *Daksha Yagam*, and Kilimanoor Vidwan Koyi Tampuran (1825-57), of *Ravana Vijayam*.

It cannot be said of Tampi that he was as profound a critic of life as Unnayi Varier or that his plots or characters compare with those of *Nalacharitam*. But there is one aspect at least in which Tampi is unexcelled: the simplicity and the melody of his verse. His *padas* like *Maninimar moulimane*, *Kalyani kanka mama vallabhae* and *Harinakshijana moulimane* are indeed the most famous in Malayalam and are widely used for the Kaikottikkali dance of the fair sex also. Lines like

> The beloved of the chakravaka bird
> mistakes thy visage for the moon
> and dreading separation from her mate
> holds thee with one eye brimming with ire
> and with the other, clouded with woe,
> she looks at her lover longingly,[1]

testify as much to the exacting standards required in Kathakali acting as to Tampi's ingenuity as an author. That he was an adept at portraying emotional states convincingly is also borne out by many passages. A good instance would be the *dandaka* (rhymed poetic prose) which describes Panchali's agitation when, in her disguise as *sairandhri* (lady's maid) in the court of Virata, the queen directs her to attend on her brother, the voluptuary Kichaka:

> At the words of the queen, the gazelle-eyed one
> shuddered, her pair of eyes
> reddened, in helpless woe
> immersed.....

[1] It is a poetic fancy that chakravaka birds live apart at night as, according to it, they have then no power of vision.

so goes the brilliant description.

Ravana Vijayam of Kilimanoor Vidwan Koyi Tampuran is another outstanding contribution to Kathakali and *attakkatha* literature. In the drawing up of plot and delineating characters he displays an originality and sympathy out of the ordinary. For instance, the Ravana of Tampuran is not a wicked *asura* as popular imagination would have him, but a human being endowed richly with human feelings, a man of impeccable taste. And, what is more, he is a decent and invincible hero. It might be that the author had to reject many unsympathetic accounts of him as given in the puranas to make a hero out of him, but that does not create the impression that the character is either a spurious one or a deliberately contrived creation. Tampuran was equally at home in Malayalam and Sanskrit and his *padas* are woven out of the most mellifluent words of both the languages.

The vision of Rambha, the celestial dancer, creates in the hero an admiration which becomes a poet of the profoundest aesthetic sensibilities. And the poetry is couched in words which are not only melodious but also, as it would seem, voluptuous in their tone-values:

> Apparelled though in silks of blue
> visible is her comely figure,
> gleaming like a column of gold
> immersed in Kalindi's waters dark;
> thou jewel, thou gem of the fair ones' race,
> art thou Laksmi or Parvati?
> Rati, perchance Bharati?
> Her lips, of streams of smiles the fount,
> surpass tenderest leaves in charm
> and brim galore with ambrosia.....

Maharaja Utram Tirunal Martanda Varma who succeeded Swati Tirunal was another patron who nurtured Kathakali. There is one *attakkatha* to his credit, a rather mediocre production, *Simhadhwaja Charitam*, but his claim to be remembered in the annals of the art rests on his life-long devotion to it—as a connoisseur, as the reformer of the Palace Kathakali Troupe and above all, as the patron of actors like Easwara

Pillai Vicharippukar and Nalanunni who have since risen to legendary fame. He extended his patronage to many composers also, and for the first time, printed and published fifty-eight *attakkathas*. The period of royal patronage was thus on the whole, one during which Kathakali reached its greatest heights.

CHAPTER IX

POETS OF THE PEOPLE

1. *Kunchan Nambyar and Tullal Poetry*

For about a century and a half after Ezhuthachan, poetry did not put forth any new shoot save in the form of *attakkathas*. A considerable volume of devotional and didactic poetry was produced under the influence of the master, but as we have already seen, it failed to fascinate the people. As for the *attakkatha* itself, the rigidity of its form as a dance-drama put a heavy premium on the spontaneity indispensable to good poetry. The great names in Kathakali like Unnayi Varier, Irayimman Tampi and Vidwan Koyi Tampuran happen to be great names in literature also because they lavished as much thought on their poetry as on the formal needs of the art. Moreover, Kathakali even in its highest perfections did not hold out a message powerful enough to make an impress on the community. The need of the hour, again, was a master with an original vision, a poet who could get to the hearts of people and refresh them with a new kind of poetry, or rather, a critic who could shake them out of their lethargy. And as it invariably happens in response to such circumstances, there came the inimitable Kunchan Nambyar—poet, humorist, satirist and founder of the popular Tullal Dance.

Nambyar was an uncommon personality, the like of him with a critical eye on contemporary society would seem to be rare in oriental poetry, in the eighteenth century especially. The staple food of his muse was the foibles of the audience for which he danced the Tullal dance, and though his themes too were from the puranas and were sugarcoated with a generous application of hearty humour, the strong vein of satire which runs throughout his sixty odd works was clear in its import to his society. It is evident that he took tone from the Koothu, that ancient art-form of Kerala which permits the Chakyar, the traditional performer, room and license to criticise his audience even while expounding puranic themes, but the

art of Tullal is Nambyar's own creation, and its poetry has seldom been surpassed in its humour and vitality.

The Tullal, according to a popular story, was devised in a day. It seems Nambyar, as a youth, earned his living by accompanying on the *mizhavu*, a drum used in the Koothu of the Chakyars. It must have been a miserable job for a genius like him, but he put up with it till late one night when, dozing off in the middle of the performance, he was mercilessly ridiculed by the Chakyar before the audience. The youth was stung to the quick, and resolved to teach the man a lesson, he left the spot quietly. The usual congregation collected in the temple premises the next night too, but this time, it was not the age-old art of the Chakyar which greeted them, it was Nambyar with a refreshingly new and hilarious dance billed as Tullal. The youth had his revenge, the poor Chakyar was deprived of his audience. It may be difficult to vouchsafe for the authenticity of this traditional account but, at any rate, it is characteristic of Nambyar who revelled in the discomfiture of vainglorious people.

The Tullal—the term literally means 'dance'—is a solo male dance in which the performer himself recites the verse and translates the same into *mudras* and movements. There is a chorus of two singers to repeat the lines and an accompanist to perform on a drum, usually the *mridangam*. The costume is a simple affair—a crown-like headgear, a breast-cover and a fluffy skirt. The work chosen for a performance runs usually into about five to six thousand lines and is long enough to last five or six hours of continuous dancing. The verse has to be recited from memory, and it is not unusual that the performer holds scores of such works in his repertoire.

It was another period of social and moral degeneracy which saw the appearance of Kunchan Nambyar on the scene. The internecine wars among the princes of Kerala which continued over the centuries and the consequent social disquiet upset the cultural equilibrium of the people and sent them down the precipice of moral decadence. The circumstances thus called for incisive criticism and Nambyar with his innate love of satire, delighted in availing himself of the opportunity. It was an age of feudal chieftains, and naturally, those big ones were the first to be served with his

bitter pill. And the populace, seldom regarded as an important factor and never treated with understanding by poets, also came in for his scrutiny. He viewed them, however, from the correct perspective and gave them too their due importance in his scheme of things.

The school he inaugurated, with its popular poetic form, was ideally suited to social criticism. It was not modelled after Sanskritic patterns, nor after the *padas* of Kathakali nor even the *Kilippattu* of Ezhuthachan: it was based on the unsophisticated folk styles popular with the masses, reformed and systematised whenever necessary, and infused with a new tempo.

The Tullal works of Nambyar are set in the simplest and chastest vocabulary of Malayalam. He has confessed to being deliberate in the choice of his style:

> The clear and lovely Kerala tongue
> alone would suit the soldiery;
> if to the difficult Sanskritic muse
> the poetaster would hitch himself,
> not only would they not comprehend,
> its onslaught would force them take to heels.

The bulk of the audience to which he catered were common soldiers, and he repeats time and again that he writes for them in their own tongue so that they could understand him.

It was not by the choice of the metres and vocabulary alone that Nambyar sought to bring his poetry to the people; his very themes are treated against the background of Kerala. The episodes are from the puranas, and their unfolding too is in conformity with puranic accounts, but all his characters are Malayalis and his location, the Kerala of his day. Thus Hastinapura and Indraprasta, Dwaraka, Nishadha and Indraloka are, to him, the capitals and courts he has seen in Kerala—Chempakasseri where he began his life or Trivandrum where he spent the best part of it; Ravana and Duryodhana, the vainglorious chieftains of his time; Rama, Dharmaputra and Nala, the noble ones; and Sita and Damayanti, the ideals of Kerala's womanhood. The processions, marriages, festivals, feasts, battles and conferences

which he portrays in such detail are exactly the same as anyone of his time could have seen in Kerala, and not even in Indraloka could one see such an event without Nayars, Nambutiris, Tamil Brahmins and Chettis! For instance, the devaloka, the world of gods, as portrayed in his *Kalyana-sougandhikam*, shows us

> Karyakars and Menokkies,
> Pattar hosts and Koyimmas,
> kitchen hands and Nayar men
> who as escorts go about,
> all the eighteen ranks of those
> who perform on Lanta pipes,
> brahmins, nobles, attendants
> and the handsome Panickers—

all of whom were officials and attendants of Kerala's eighteenth century courts—and, most likely, members of Nambyar's own audience!

In *Kartaviryarjuna Vijayam* we hear Ravana give the following instructions to be conveyed to Kartaviryarjuna:

> Half the crop should come to me,
> and the entire pepper yield;
> coconut and areca
> mango, jack—nay, every tree
> I must sure enumerate
> and on them levy taxes.

To a reader who is not aware of the context, it would doubtless seem that the lines are spoken by a prince of Kerala who flourished a century or two ago and that the command is issued to a vassal or a defeated prince.

The Tullals are thus profusely strewn with pictures of the Kerala of Nambyar's time, and inevitably there are anarchorisms and anachronisms. The propriety of such a method is open to question, as indeed it was questioned by critics of the poet's own time and a matter of doubt to us too today, but we have to remember that he danced for the common soldier who liked it that way and derived from it

some significance which otherwise would have been lost to him. We have even to suppose that his audience would never have doubted the presence of Nambutiris and Nayars—and perhaps some Christians and Muslims too!—in the courts of Indra and Duryodhana. Nambyar had a perfect understanding of mass psychology; in realistic portraiture he was a master-hand.

This mixing up of Kerala with the puranic landscape was, in fact, indispensable for the social criticism which was his ultimate aim. Any contradiction in his method is excusable, for the conviction he carries with his audience counts for more than the cost he has to pay in the form of these deviations. But being a superb artist possessed of a sound imagination, he has taken care to avoid, to minimise at least, such contradictions wherever possible without sacrificing the element of realism. A good instance would be his description of Hanuman as he appears in *Kalyanasougandhikam:* it is as much relevant to any old and infirm monkey which any one of his audience could have seen as, one can imagine, to the grand puranic hero who is out to tame his haughty brother, Bhima:

> With hands and legs languid,
> tail withered
> and body shrunk,
> with claws incessantly scratching
> and hair profusely falling
> and eyes feebly winking,
> bedimmed and filled with pus,
> he lay on the way
> the invincible hero,
> vanquisher of all the worlds.

His imageries too have this quality; they serve to elucidate his theme and, being drawn from environments familiar to Kerala, create credence in his audience. Thus Ravana, struggling to get out of the flood created by Kartaviryarjuna, swims

> like a sprawling country craft
> fitted with a score of oars;

Duryodhana ridicules the generously built Bhima as

> a bloated fellow
> grown like a lubberly plantain tree;

and Ravana describes the arms of Kartaviryarjuna as

> burly but useless
> like the rooting branches of the banyan tree.

Nambyar evinces a mischievous delight in exploiting all the contradictions which his themes involve and relating them to his own society, to its foibles in particular. In *Panchendropakhyanam*, for example, he has to describe a situation when Kala, god of death, was done away with by Siva and the earth took on a weird look with deathless people:

> The earth is filled with old men,
> there's no way at all to die—
> Kala no longer comes for them.
> Grandfather's old grandfather lives
> and his own grandparent's not yet dead—
> and grandfathers five hundred years old
> are children still, their grandparents live.
> There's no gruel for children at home,
> eight or ten *paras* of rice won't do.

But the description does not end there, for if it does, Nambyar would miss a golden opportunity to dig at a few specimens of the human species notorious for their dealings:

> Hard indeed for the astrologer
> to dupe now with his reckonings;
> and well-known though the camaraderie
> betwixt the physician and Yama,
> the former can't now kill, his friend,
> the god of death, no longer helps;
> the arm of need now falls heavy
> on the master of black arts too:

not a cash the clever one can
earn these days with all his might.

There was no section of the community which did not come in for Nambyar's barbs of ridicule. The brunt of it, however, was directed towards the vainglorious aristocrats. The common people too had their share, but that was nothing much compared to his attacks on the pomp and pride of the upper classes. It was in the higher circles that he moved, and so he had to be careful in not incurring their wrath, but his gibes made under cover of the puranas guaranteed him his safety.

The literature which Nambyar produced is unique in extent and variety. The Tullal works alone number over sixty. He has also composed some *kilippattus*, *attakkathas* and a good many other works which are not easy to classify. He was well versed in Sanskrit too, and it is held by some scholars that Ramapanivada who composed *Raghaviyam*, a *mahakavya*, *Sitaraghavam*, a drama, and some other works in Sanskrit like *Chandrika-vidhi* and *Lilavati-vidhi* is none other than Nambyar himself. If that is so, the extent of his output would be incredible indeed.

2. *Ramapurathu Varier and Kuchelavrutham*

There is no social criticism in Ramapurathu Varier, but he too was a poet of the people like Kunchan Nambyar and *Kuchelavrutham Vanchippattu*, the poem on which his fame rests, was written for them to sing and enjoy. The story is a familiar puranic episode—how the poor Brahmin Sudama (Kuchela) was received with great affection by the Lord of Dwaraka (Lord Krishna), his old friend and classmate, and was blessed with infinite riches. It is not unusual with the rich to drive the poor out of their portals and pretend to be unaware of any old friendship that might have subsisted between them, but here is Lord Krishna, Varier tells his readers, a great king, embracing the miserable Kuchela, taking him to the seventh storey of his mansion, seating him on a golden couch and worshipping him as he would no other being. The story is replete with deep and genuine sentiments strong enough

to create a response in the common people. It is composed with extreme candour and simplicity, and the style itself is that of the popular *vanchippattu*, the boat-song which one can hear everywhere in the lagoons of Kerala. It was not the learned ones whom the authors of the *champus* and *attakkathas* sought to please that Varier had in view, it was the unsophisticated folks who would love to be told such sentimental tales of true friendship. And no wonder that *Kuchelavrutham* is still sung by boatmen who ply their craft in the vast stretches of Kerala's rivers and backwaters.

The circumstances of Varier's life have a direct bearing on the poignancy of his tale. Born in a poor family at Ramapuram in the Meenachil taluk of the Travancore area, he knew what it was to be poor, and one day, harassed beyond endurance by his indigence, he set out from home in quest of some relief, not knowing from whom or where. Arriving at Vaikom where there is a famous temple of Siva and learning that Maharaja Martanda Varma of Travancore too was there to worship at the shrine, he composed some *slokas* eulogizing the ruler and dedicated them to him. The Maharaja was pleased but the only favour he showed the poet at the moment was to ask him to accompany him on the boat on the return trip to Trivandrum. Varier did so and when the boat set out, the prince commanded him to compose a song, extempore, for the boatmen to sing to the rhythm of rowing. Thus was born, it is said, the famous *Kuchelavrutham Vanchippattu*.

The great beauty of *Kuchelavrutham* which marks it out from all other works, is the extreme sincerity of the poet; the hero is the poet himself, and even as Kuchela saw his benefactor in Krishna, Varier saw his in the Maharaja. There is a strong vein of the subjective in the poem, especially where the poverty of the hero and the mercies of the benefactor are touched upon, and every word is charged with a deep pathos. There is no attempt to decorate the verse with ornate imageries or other poetic devices, it takes its tone direct from its spontaneity. In this respect *Kuchelavrutham* is an antithesis to the earlier Manipravala works which, as we have seen, are laden with all kinds of artificialities. We may admire those learned poets who have woven out elaborate

imageries and soared into the empyrean of poetic fancy, but none of them could overwhelm us as does Varier with his naive idiom and unvarnished emotions.

In all the puranas Varier could not have found a theme more appropriate than the Kuchela episode for his verse. Besides the circumstance of the harrowing poverty which obsessed the poet and contributed to his complete identification with the hero, there are many others which enhance its overall poignancy. For instance, Varier could easily imagine that Kuchela's attitude of mind in making a present of *aval*, beaten rice, to Krishna was the same as his in dedicating his quatrains to the Maharaja. And again, the complaint voiced by Kuchela's wife,

> There's no grief so sharp like poverty—
> the *illom* too is toppling down,

is a complaint which Varier too had often heard in his own *illom*, house. It is a very touching portrait that he draws of Kuchela's wife: she pounds the rice in the darkness of the night, it is full of pebbles and unhusked paddy, and she hands the packet over to her lord, makes him her obeisance and sends him on his mission. Her humility and understanding of her husband's plight cool the flaming tongues of poverty. And we see straight in front of us the shrivelled figure of the devout Brahmin picking up the packet and setting out with his palm-leaf umbrella, bidding farewell to his affectionate wife.

The description of the meeting between the long separated friends throbs with the warmth of human affection. Krishna, seated in the seventh storey of his mansion, "sees his classmate down and far away":

> How sad the sight! clad in dirty rags
> and one piece across the shoulders thrown
> and tucking up the wrapped up bundle
> together with a book in his arm-pit
> and forehead with its prominent scar
> caused by ritualistic prostrations,
> smeared all over with sacred ash,
> and holding a tattered umbrella

and a *rudraksha* rosary
chanting the names of the Lord, and mind
focussed on Him, and moving slow...

It was a sight which wrenched a tear from the Supreme One Who presides over the Universe:

Maybe because of the happiness
seeing the Brahmin, or in woe
thinking of his dire misery—
can't say why—His eyes were wet
with tears: has He, the Lotus-eyed One,
cried ever in all His life?

There is the unutterable warmth of human sympathy in Varier's rendering of the situation. Krishna has never cried before, nor ever after, but here for Him is a moment when a tear would immensely add to His stature. Perhaps the poet could rightly claim credit for achieving with a few lines an effect which a lengthier account hardly could.

Varier has not written much, but what he did has turned out to be an invaluable contribution to Malayalam literature.

3. *Poetry after Nambyar*

There was yet another lull in the output of poetry after Kunchan Nambyar, and this time, it was as much due to the absence of poets of any considerable attainments as to the potitical upheavals which rocked the land towards the close of the eighteenth century. The invasions of Tippu Sultan paralysed the whole of North Kerala, and the cultural centres of the region, the libraries housed in palaces and temples especially, were destroyed. Poets and men of letters had to come off their moorings to escape the avalanche, and during their short sojourn in Travancore, they were in no frame of mind to resume their former preoccupations. It took them many years to settle down back in their old habitations, but by then everything was lost and, deprived of their means for comfortable living, they were too frustrated to push forward their literary activities.

There were yet other troubles in store for Kerala. The Raja of Pazhassi in the north and Velu Tampi, Minister of Travancore in the south, raised the standard of revolt against the British. Their efforts were of no avail before superior force, and the final outcome of the uprisings was the sad end of the brave patriots—the former was killed in battle and the latter killed himself—and their following and the strengthening of the British hegemony over Kerala. And in inverse proportion to the ascendency of the new rulers, the fortunes of the native princes, especially of the north, waned and before long the poets were left with no patrons and hardly any incentive.

There was, however, one new development amidst all this disquiet; the few poets who were spared harassment developed a musical style after the old *kilippattus* and ballads in Dravidian metres. The bulk of the new compositions were either translations of the puranas or poems based on puranic themes but the output of *attakkathas* continued to be considerable. Occasionally secular themes like those of *Chanakyasutram* and *Panchatantram* also were adopted for literary purposes. The best known among the poets of this epoch who developed a musical style was Irayimman Tampi, courtier of Maharaja Swati Tirunal of Travancore. His achievements as a composer of *attakkathas* are considerable, but it is in his musical compositions that his genius finds fuller articulation. The most famous lullaby in Malayalam, *Omanathinkal kitavo*?—'Art thou the darling crescent moon?'—is his composition, and in this, as well as in most others, we find him madly in love with all the beautiful things in life and Nature. Here is that mother softly singing to sleep 'the treasure given by God'.

Omanattinkal kitavo—nalla
komala tamara poovo?
Poovil niranja madhuvo—pari—
poornendu tante nilavo?
Putten pavizhakkotiyo—cheru
tattakal konchum mozhiyo?
Chanchatiyatum mayilo?—mrudu
panchamam patum kuyilo?

Eashwaran tanna nidhiyo—para—
meshwariyentum kiliyo?

Art thou the darling crescent moon,
or the lovely lotus bloom?
Honey which fills the blossom's heart,
or the full moon's effulgence?
Art thou the radiant coral gem,
or the parrot's dulcet tongue?
Peacock dancing rapturously,
or the koel's melody?
or the treasure given by God
or the bird of Parvati?...

Tampi has composed a good many songs after classical patterns also. They are extremely poetic and warm with emotions. The erotic is his favourite *rasa*.

Vidwan Koyi Tampuran, another courtier of Swati Tirunal and author of *Ravanavijayam*, is one among the very few poets who imitated Nambyar successfully. His *Santanagopalam Tullal* stands comparison with the best of its kind.

Such was the state of Malayalam poetry during the early half of the nineteenth century. Though the British in Malabar and the ruling houses of Travancore and Cochin broke the pomp and power of the feudal aristocracy, yet enough means were permitted to them to live in comfort. The middle classes were mostly the tenants of the landed upper classes and being farmers, they too enjoyed a certain measure of prosperity. The lower classes were never moneyed, but they could always exchange their labour for enough to eat. There was yet no scramble for the expensive trappings of modern civilization, and the consciousness which subsisted in the higher strata of society that they were the guardians of their dependants and the reciprocal attitude of those dependants made for a certain degree of amity and stability in the social structure.

The placidity which characterises the literature of the first half of the nineteenth century would seem to stem from the indolence into which society had settled after all the wars and revolts. There was a sense of immutability about

things and hardly any provocation to convey in literature the aspirations of the community. The lethargy which thus settled on all classes of the people left the literary field rather cold and barren once again.

CHAPTER X

MALAYALAM AND ENGLISH

1. *English Education and the Work of Missionaries*

The coming of English marks the next, and perhaps the most important, phase in the evolution of Malayalam literature. When the British stabilised their power in Kerala it became evident that in the long run their language would have repercussions on Malayalam and its literature, but when, in 1835, they drew up their educational policy and implemented it a little later, the need to master the language of the rulers became compelling and its consequences to Malayalam literature, immediate and far-reaching. The Contemporary Period in Malayalam literature may well be deemed to begin with this contact, for its influence is still the dominant force in the literary sphere.

It was Tippu's invasion which paved the way for British ascendency in Kerala. The insurrections of the Raja of Pazhassi in Malabar, Paliathu Achan in Cochin and Velu Tampi in Travancore created a great consternation in the British camp, but the defeat of the local powers was to them the signal for the tightening of their hold over the land as a whole. Malabar passed directly into their hands and Travancore and Cochin were left to continue under treaty obligations as what were called Native States. Consequently English education was introduced in all the three areas and, in Travancore and Cochin, it was actively pushed forward by Col. Munro, Resident for both the States and Dewan of Travancore during the reigns of Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai and Rani Gouri Parvati Bai (1810-1829). The Resident effected many administrative reforms in both the States after the British pattern and this also, in turn, accelerated the pace of English education. The reigns of Swati Tirunal, and Utram Tirunal (1829-1860) of Travancore saw the further expansion of the new education, for not only were these Maharajas enthusiastic votaries of English, they even encouraged the activities of Protestant Missions, which, like

the Catholics of the earlier centuries, were making substantial contributions to the growth of literature. Thus the Rev. Benjamin Bailey published a Malayalam-English Dictionary (1846) and an English-Malayalam Dictionary (1848) and the Rev. Joseph Peat, a Malayalam Grammar (1841). Maharaja Swati Tirunal rendered ample assistance, financially and otherwise, for the publication of these works. In the Government Press established by Maharaja Swati Tirunal at Trivandrum the printing of Malayalam works was undertaken on a fairly large scale. Easwara Pilla Vicharippukar, a dependant of Utram Tirunal, establishde the Kerala Vilasam Press at Trivandrum and issued from it a collection of Irayimman Tampi's works. A collection of *attakkathas* and the Manipravala *padas* of Swati Tirunal were also brought out by this press. In the meantime many English schools were established in both the States and the pace of the new learning was accelerated under the aegis of the respective Governments.

As Malabar was under the direct administration of the British there was hardly any impediment in implementing the new educational policy. In 1857 the Madras University, together with those of Bombay and Calcutta, came into being and higher learning was thus brought within the reach of the people. But more than the help rendered by the Government for the cause of education in Malabar was that rendered by the Basel Mission which concentrated its activities in that zone. It had its own printing establishments and the missionaries, who were men of letters as well, issued from them literary works also, besides religious ones.

By far the most important contribution Malayalam literature ever had from a missionary was the Dictionary of Dr. Gundert. Though similar endeavours were undertaken by Europeans from early times none could produce a lexicon so scientific and comprehensive and none so vital to Malayalam. A German by birth, he came to Kerala in 1828 and, in a very short while, gained enough proficiency to preach the faith in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. And when he decided to work in Malabar under the auspices of the Basel Mission he concentrated all his linguistic studies on Malayalam and enriched his knowledge of it with the cultural

features, manners and customs and the legends and every extant specimen of literature obtaining among the people. He wrote many religious tracts and his knowledge of Malayalam was availed of by the British to produce some text books for study in the new English schools. *Pathamala*, a primer, and *Malayala Vyakaranam*, a grammar, are perhaps his more important works in this category.

Thus the intimacy which he cultivated with the people and the language of Kerala led him to think in terms of compiling a dictionary for Malayalam. The experience he had with the Mission and the assignments from the Government encouraged him to undertake this stupendous task, and for years he preoccupied himself with collecting every work produced in Malayalam until then and an extensive research work on the philology and the connotations of the words he garnered from every possible source. For full ten years after his return to Germany in 1859, he occupied himself with compiling the work and finally, in 1872, it was issued from the Basel Mission Press at Mangalore. It was indeed a labour of love and no amount of praise is too much for the scientific way in which he set about in presenting to his brethren of Kerala a work of such magnitude and significance.

2. *The Text Book Committee of Travancore*

English education proved instrumental in bringing about many changes in the social life of the people. More and more schools were established every year and there was a rapid spread of literacy. But there was one handicap in the conduct of schools, and that was the lack of suitable text-books in Malayalam. To begin with the need was met to some extent by Dr. Gundert in Malabar and the missionaries of the Church Mission Society in Travancore, but there was still a lot more to be done. It was then that Maharaja Ayilyam Tirunal of Travancore (1861-75) and his Dewan Madhava Rao constituted a Text Book Committee, the first of its kind in Kerala.

It was left to Kerala Varma Valia Koyi Tampuran, an eminent poet and scholar who presided over the Committee,

to set the tone of the text-books to be written in prose. And, in turn, it was the early text-books which set the tone for the entire range of modern Malayalam prose.

The writers of the first text-books were confronted with serious difficulties, for they had no models to emulate. They could not, for instance, arrive at any definite understanding in regard to the standards appropriate to different age-groups. Standards, be they in prose or poetry, can be evolved only in the light of many years of experience, and this advantage the beginners could not have.

The publications which Kerala Varma brought out were primers for the first three standards, text-books on the histories of Travancore and India, one on geography, another on economics, and a book of essays called *Vijnanamanjari*. Though he availed himself of the co-operation of the members of the Committee for the writing of these books, the major part of the work—the lessons of the primers particularly—was his own undertaking. The only guides he had in their writing were similar text-books in English.

The efforts of Kerala Varma at enriching Malayalam prose were met with enthusiastic response from all quarters. Maharaja Visakham Tirunal who succeeded his brother Maharaja Ayilyam Tirunal was all encouragement for the new ventures and, in accordance with his directions, Kerala Varma undertook the writing of many books in prose. The most important of them was *Mahacharita Sangraham*, an anthology of fourteen essays on the lives of great men. It was not an original work—it was based on Munder's *Treasury of Biographies*—but being the first work in biographical literature, it has its own importance. It may be interesting to note that the Maharaja himself was a facile writer in both English and Malayalam and that the first five essays in the collection were written by him. The other nine are by Kerala Varma. He used to contribute liberally on political topics to journals like the *Calcutta Review* before he ascended the *gadi* and in Malayalam produced an anthology of essays called *Nibandhamala*. In 1880 was published Kerala Varma's *Akbar*, a novel translated from the English of an original work in Dutch, and that again was in accordance with the wishes of the Maharaja. The collaboration between Visakham Tirunal

and Kerala Varma was thus, on the whole, a beneficent circumstance for the Malayalam Language and to them is due all credit for setting the pattern for its modern prose literature.

Books on grammar too were produced and the names of Dr. Gundert, Garthwhite, George Mathen, Pachu Moothatu and Kovunni Nedungadi are always remembered in this context. P. Govinda Pillai, a graduate of the Madras University and Steward of the Travancore Palace, wrote a history of Malayalam literature—the first of its kind in the language. It need hardly be stated that all this activity was the direct result of English education.

3. *Journalism*

Another important development of those days was the beginning of journalism. The earliest of the newspapers were devoted to religious matters, though there were some like the *Satyanada Kahalam* which permitted space for non-religious writings also, but it was with the *Keralamitram* published from Cochin by a Gujerati industrialist, Devji Bhimji, that Kerala came to have its first secular paper (1860). It may seem strange that a Gujerati should be the first publisher of a newspaper in Malayalam, but the circumstances of his life were such that Kerala counted to him far more than perhaps his own birthplace. Arriving at Cochin as a helpless boy with a widowed mother to look after, he built up a vast industrial empire and, devoting himself to public causes, established the *Keralamitram Press* from which was issued the first regular newspaper in his adopted language. He was singularly fortunate in the choice of his editor, it was Kandattil Verghese Mappila who, in due course, was to make a great name not only in journalism but also in literature.

The first paper to come out with political criticism as the main purpose was the *Kerala Patrika* founded by Chenkulattu Kunhirama Menon (1885). He discussed political and social questions rather freely and published critical editorials also. In 1886 was founded the *Malayali* of Trivandrum, a paper still extant, by C. Krishna Pillai and C. V. Raman Pillai. The *Nasrani Dipika* (1887) which is now issued

under the title *Dipika* and the *Malayala Manorama* of Kottayam (1890) which continues to be published under the same name were the other important newspapers started during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Besides newspapers, magazines also were published during this period. The *Vidya Vilasini* (1881) published by P. Govinda Pillai, author of the history of Malayalam literature, with the active assistance of Maharaja Visakham Tirunal, seems to be the first literary journal in Malayalam. It was in this magazine that Kerala Varma published, in instalments, his famous translation of *Sakuntalam*. Subsequently more and more of such literary magazines like the *Sujananandini* of Paravur Kesavan Asan and the *Vidyavinodini* of C. P. Achyuta Menon came into being, but the best of them all which exerted a profound influence on the course of Malayalam literature was the *Bhashaposhini* of Kandattil Verghese Mappila published from Kottayam (1892). The other periodicals of this period which deserve mention are the *Rasikaranjini*, the *Kavanodayam* and the *Lakshmi Bai*.

3. *The Journalist and Malayalam Literature*

Journalism had important repercussions on the course of Malayalam literature. Keeping pace with English education there grew the tendency to think freely and assimilate every kind of knowledge. Journalism facilitated the growth and expression of these tendencies and these, in turn, contributed to changing the complexion of modern literature.

It was the journalist who made Malayalam prose more flexible and expressive. It gained more from him than from all the conscious and organised efforts of litterateurs to develop it as a literary medium. The style which he developed was such as would enable the statement of common things in an easy idiom. This new prose was put to far more uses afterwards and its effectiveness for literary purposes was also enhanced.

There were many upheavals in store for journalism in the early decades of the present century. K. Ramakrishna Pillai set a new code for the journalist with his fearless criticism of the corruptions which set in on the administrative

fabric of Travancore and the doings of the Dewan and his favourites. He edited many papers, some his own and some for other publishers, but it was as the editor of the *Swadesabhimani* that he made history. His days in Travancore, however, were numbered, for the authorities, haunted by the spectre of his scathing criticism, banished him from the State.

It was the World War of 1914 which kindled the curiosity of the people to know more and more about the outside world. Bi-weeklies and tri-weeklies were started, and a good many dailies too. In 1956, there were thirty-four dailies for a population of about 15 million and far many more weeklies and other periodicals. The political awareness which these journals create is indeed considerable.

CHAPTER XI

THE NOVEL

1. *The First Experiment*

In any assessment of contemporary Malayalam literature one conclusion would remain inescapable: all the present forms and movements owe their origin to English literature. The whole range of it—novel, short story, drama, essay, literary criticism, biography, history, travelogue—is conceived after English patterns; and poetic forms like the short epic, the lyric, the sonnet and the monologue also have taken their tone from the same source. The rest of the history of Malayalam literature is the history of these various forms and movements.

To begin with, let us take the novel—an important form in any modern literature. The Bengalis, it seems, were the first in India to adapt it for literary espression. But soon enough the South Indian languages followed suit.

In 1887 Appu Nedungadi wrote *Kundalata*, and with that Malayalam literature came in possession of its first original novel. It cannot, of course, be said that this first experiment was quite a success, there are many defects, the most pronounced being the declamatory tone of its language which often reminds the reader of the *itihasas* of Sanskrit. But it has to be granted that Nedungadi is able to keep up the suspense of his tale to the very end; and in this, he seems to have taken his clue from English novels, particularly from the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. The absence of any correct or comprehensive view of life is another defect with *Kundalata*. As the first effort in the language, however, it is an admirable performance.

2. *O. Chandu Menon*

With the publication in 1889 of O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*, Malayalam literature had its first novel which not only conforms to all the canons of modern fiction, but

deserves to be ranked, by its intrinsic worth, with the best in Malayalam. It shows us an author of uncommon attainments and an original and critical view of life.

The author himself tells us that he was inspired in writing *Indulekha* by *Henrietta Temple* of Lord Beaconsfield.

Indulekha is a social novel—a very realistic picture of the social order of those days as drawn by a competent artist who had the benefit of modern education. The upper classes were heirs to an age-old culture, but orthodoxy and the evils of landlordism were corroding the basis of that culture and driving the Nambutiris and Nayars fast down the precipice of social and moral degradation. Countless were the malpractices for which sanction was sought for in tradition, and, inevitably, there was disintegration in the family structure, and marriage itself became a farce. The enlightenment provided by English education and the idealism upheld by English literature equipped Chandu Menon to survey the whole scene dispassionately and comprehensively and trace the evil forces at work behind the decadence. The ugliness of it all moved him, and his reactions took the form of *Indulekha*.

Madhavan and Indulekha, the hero and the heroine, are the representatives of the new generation enlightened by modern education, and Panchu Menon and Suri Nambutiri of traditional orthodoxy. It is the clash between the forces of the new and the old, between progress and blind conservatism, which Chandu Menon portrays in the language of basic human values and emotions.

The story is simple enough: Madhavan, a highly educated Nayar youth, loves the beautiful Indulekha, another votary of the new ideals. But Panchu Menon, head of the matriarchal family of which she is a member, would not hear of it, he would better present her to Suri Nambutiri, a rich Brahmin noble, an association with whom, he thinks, would add to his family prestige. Of course, Indulekha would not agree to it, both because she loved Madhavan and because she could not reconcile herself to the idea of being one of the many wives and concubines of a middle-aged Nambutiri with his outmoded ways; and the conflict developing through many episodes culminates at last in the happy union of the lovers.

The conflict is inevitable when people of different temperaments and traditions are brought together, but Chandu Menon's success lies in this, that he unfolds it realistically and brings about the denouement convincingly. The effect of the novel lies not so much in the drama of its episodes as in the realism of its characters. In fact, the circumstances which stand against the union of the lovers leave but only a vague impression when once the story is read, but not so characters like Suri Nambutiri, Panchu Menon, Karuthedam and Indulekha. They are so compelling in their realism that the impression they make is indelible. The social background of the story, which had changed considerably since then, also makes for the success of the novel with its vividness and fidelity to details.

There have not been many literary figures in Kerala, barring Kunchan Nambyar, who dared to expose with such courage and conviction the evils which deform society. And the social reform for which *Indulekha* proved instrumental was indeed stupendous. It is a matter of doubt if any other organised effort did or could have done as much in fighting blind orthodoxy. The conservatives among the Nambutiris and the Nayars were, naturally enough, offended with the author, but their indignation, which was proof enough that the thrust went home, could only serve to stabilise the value and importance of the novel as a force for social reform. There have been many social reformers and many organised efforts to eradicate the evils portrayed in *Indulekha* but none could convince the people of its imperative need as did this novel. Chandu Menon's was thus the first conscious attempt in Malayalam literature to use the novel as an effective instrument of social protest.

Death snatched away the novelist before he could complete his second and more ambitious undertaking *Sarada*. How it would have shaped itself, had he completed it, is difficult to guess, but the fragment itself is a work of rare literary beauty. The mastery he had gained over the novelist's craft, thanks to his experience with *Indulekha*, is abundantly borne out by this fragment. It would seem that his experience of life—being a judge, it must have been quite comprehensive—would have found fuller expression in this novel

which, as it is, ends with the beginning of a major litigation. The law-courts and lawyers, the court-birds who revel in litigation and the heads of matriarchal families and their avaricious stewards—every picture and every character is an authentic creation. He is so familiar with every one of them that he could delve into the deepest recesses of their being and present them with such raw realism. What the outcome of the litigation would have been and how the fortunes of young Sarada, the heroine, would have turned out, are difficult to conjecture, for the edifice of the story is so ambitious. It may be added, incidentally, that there have been many attempts to complete the novel and that each author has his own conclusions to present.

Chandu Menon's mastery in character-drawing is best instanced by this fragment. The innocent happiness which the human mind is capable of as also the devilish cruelties it can perpetrate are given body by his characters.

3. *C. V. Raman Pillai*

C. V. Raman Pillai is among the greatest names in Malayalam literature. As a novelist—as a writer of historical romances after the manner of Scott—his works have never been surpassed in their epic grandeur and vastness. If Chandu Menon could paint realistic pictures of contemporary society with all its deformities, C. V. Raman Pillai could do the same for the dim past with all its colour and romance. It would, of course, be incorrect to compare one with the other—the ultimate questions inherent in any such comparison would be the relative merits of realism and romanticism—but it can be stated that, if the realistic approach could make *Indulekha* so much of a success, the romantic could do more for C. V. Raman Pillai's historical novels.

Thus when his *Martanda Varma* appeared in 1891 it marked an altogether different movement in Malayalam literature. The story concerns an internal feud between Martanda Varma of Venad—a little kingdom in the extreme south which, with subsequent annexations, the ambitious prince expanded into the erstwhile Travancore State—and his two cousins, the Tampis, over the *gadi* of the kingdom. The central

figure of the romance, however, is Anantapadmanabhan, an able lieutenant of the Prince. The story opens with a weird forest scene where we find the hero lying as good as dead, mauled fatally by the henchmen of the Tampis. The timely arrival of a Pathan noble and his retinue saves him, and from here on the story develops a tremendous power which sweeps the reader forward through its many thrills and episodes. Parukutty, Anantapadmanabhan's sweet-heart, falls grievously ill over the decision of her parents to give her in marriage to the elder Tampi—everyone believes that her lover is no more—but he is there, and, interfering *in cognito*, saves her from both her illness and the clutches of Tampi. He follows the prince all over the place in the guise of a mad man and rescues him, often rather miraculously, from the designs of his enemies. The Tampis and their followers are exterminated finally, royal authority established and the lovers brought together in wedlock.

When the theme, partly historical and partly imaginative, has been developed into a novel with countless characters and ramifications, it takes on the authenticity of a historical document, dealing realistically with one of the most heroic and colourful epochs in the history of Travancore. The characters are drawn so convincingly, each one with his own distinctive personality, that it is hard to distinguish the historical ones from the fictitious. The majority of the episodes, too, are the author's creation, but the reader is drawn to believe that everything had actually happened. Though the distance of time—it deals with the history of two centuries agone—has much to do with investing it with the stamp of history, yet, more than anything else, it is the author's powers of description and conception of characters on a grand historical scale which impart to it the stamp of authenticity. It seems that Raman Pillai has taken his clue from Scott's *Ivanhoe* in conceiving the plot as well as the characters, but the atmosphere is so thoroughly Kerala's that a reader would hardly suspect any affinity. All the characters are of a superhuman stature and nobility and in Subhadra who adores the prince silently and tragically, we have one of the noblest creations in the entire range of Malayalam fiction.

The imitations which *Indulekha* and *Martanda Varma* brought

forth were many, but hardly could any reach the heights of the models. In fact there was such a plethora of them that a satirist, Kizhakkeppat Ramankutty Menon, was forced to write a bitter parody, *Parangodiparinayam*. There was an analogous situation a little earlier in drama too when, following Kerala Varma's translation of *Sakuntalam*, certain imitators took it into their heads to produce imbecile copies of it rather indiscriminately.

After a silence of twenty years C. V. Raman Pillai came forward with another historical romance *Dharmaraja*. It is, in a sense, a continuation of *Martanda Varma*, for the story is woven round Maharaja Kartika Tirunal of Travancore known also as Dharma Raja who succeeded Martanda Varma, and the conflicts have much to do with the successors of Tampi's henchmen, the eight chieftains known as the Ettuvittil Pillamar. In his efforts to stabilise the dynasty, Martanda Varma had to do away with those chieftains and their families by execution, exile and confiscation of property. But it so happens, according to the novel, that one woman belonging to the family of Kazhakoottathu Pilla manages to escape the total annihilation and gives birth, in exile, to two boys who, being twins, looked alike—a circumstance needed for the story. After a lapse of many years they return to Trivandrum disguised as ascetics and bearing the names of Ugra Haripanchanan (The Terrible Lion) and Santa Haripanchanan (The Peaceful Lion) with the sole purpose of wreaking vengeance on the royal house which brought about the ruin of their family. They are assisted in their conspiracy by a local chieftain Chilambinethu Chandrakkaran who, as promised by the Haripanchanans, hopes for a big position in the administration to follow the overthrow of the royal house. And when his nephew Kesavan Unni falls in love with Meenakshi of the opposite camp, and the Haripanchanans create obstacles with a view to furthering their political aims, we have a situation wherein politics becomes inextricably involved with the fortunes of the lovers. The efforts of the conspirators near fruition when, thanks to the righteousness of the Maharaja—his synonym means Prince of Righteousness—and the patriotism and far-sightedness of his able lieutenant, the future Dewan Kesava Pillai, their

efforts are foiled and the royal cause is won. The brothers meet their doom caught in the coils of their own plans and the lovers realise their hopes.

Dharmaraja excels *Martanda Varma* in the manipulation of plot, in the delineation of characters and in a more comprehensive view of life. Its only drawback is the ornateness of its language: it is heavy with Sanskritic vocabulary. But when that difficulty is overcome, we have a more profound and a more closely knit novel than the earlier production. Its euphemism is perhaps excusable, for it is a direct outcome of the grandeur of the theme itself.

The suspense which C. V. Raman Pillai keeps up to the very last page of the book is indeed commendable. But what counts more than the show of such skills is the insight and mastery with which he models his characters. They stand on a higher plane, no doubt, than the common run of humanity, and can even be described superhuman, but as incarnations of the passions which animate the human frame, there is no doubt about their possibility. The Haripanchanan brothers and their ally Chilambinethu Chandrakkaran are thus, for instance, unearthly creations, ambitious and revengeful, and yet the intensely human feelings which they are capable of, be it even occasionally and in spite of themselves, invest them with a remarkable degree of realism. That the author could create common types also quite successfully is fully borne out by such characters as Ummini Pilla, Kuppachar and Pavatikkochi.

The *magnum opus* among the works of C. V. Raman Pillai, and perhaps in the whole compass of Malayalam fiction, is *Rama Raja Bahadur*. It is unsurpassed in almost every quality required of the historical romance—in the strength of the plot, the dramatic progression of events and their indispensability, the delineation of characters and the effect of a general harmony. The story begins from where *Dharmaraja* is left off, and is thus the last book of a saga on the history of Travancore.

The righteousness of the Maharaja and the administrative acumen of his Dewan, Kesava Pillai, ensure the stability of the dynasty and security within the borders of the State, but the impending invasion of Tippu Sultan of Mysore is a serious

circumstance which confronts all right-thinking people. The fire of revenge which had been smouldering since the suppression of Haripanchanans is also throwing out new flames to consume the dynasty. The spearhead for this last stand against the royal house is Chilambinethu Chandrakkaran who manages to flee Travancore on the annihilation of his confreres in the unsuccessful conspiracy. Arriving at Mysore, he gains the acquaintance of the millionaire Gangu Ram, becomes a spy in the employ of Tippu Sultan, and returns to Trivandrum in the guise of a jewel merchant, Manicka Gounden by name. Here at home is the feudal chief Perinchakkodan nourishing a grievance against his relation, the Dewan, for his (the Dewan's) reluctance to persuade his bodyguard Trivikraman to marry his (Perinchakkodan's) daughter. Determined to teach the Dewan a lesson, the feudal chief gathers all his men and money to help Tippu in the projected invasion. The romantic interest of the novel is provided by Trivikraman, the Dewan's protege and Savitri, daughter of the lovers who figure in *Dharmaraja*, Kesavan Unni and Meenakshi.

Preparations are afoot to meet the menace from Mysore, and the conspirators get busy. The fortunes of the young lovers get mixed up with the course of political events, and what is worse, Kesavan Unni begins to suspect his wife, Meenakshi, of some kind of a nefarious relationship with the Dewan. Therefore, when the Dewan desires that the young people might be united, he turns a deaf ear and decides, instead, to marry her off to one Ajitasimhan, a spy in the service of Tippu Sultan who masquerades as a Kshatriya youth. The first step in Perinchakkodan's programme of revenge was the kidnapping of Savitri: he takes her to Tippu's camp to wreak vengeance on her lover Trivikraman. The story progresses through many such episodes which keep the reader spell-bound, and culminates in the defeat of Tippu, the end of Perinchakkodan, the retrieving of Savitri by Chilambinethu Chandrakaran—she is the last female member in his line and hence indispensable for its perpetuation—and his own heroic end in the Alwaye river in his attempt to save her. The suspicions of Kesavan Unni towards his wife are cleared up—it was a figment of his weak imagination—

and the young people are permitted their long-delayed happiness.

In the drawing up of the plot and the *dramatis personnae* we see a master mind exercising its best faculties. The situations are so cleverly contrived that the reader is kept in perpetual suspense, and the characters so convincingly drawn that one is compelled to sympathise with all their conflicting aspirations. As in *Dharmaraja*, we meet abnormal types like Perinchakkodan and Manicka Gounden and common ones like Kodanta Asan and Kurungodan, but be they abnormal or common, they seem to us unquestionably true and compel our approbation. The author takes us to a distant past recreated by his romantic imagination, and we are there moving about with historical personalities and witnessing some of the grandest spectacles in the land's history. *Rama Raja Bahadur* is undoubtedly one of the happiest attempts ever made in Malayalam to conjure up the past, and the success of its author is due as much to his romantic imagination as to a full cognition of the passions which stir men and women in all their abundance and diversity.

4. *Other Historical Novels: K. M. Panicker*

Bhutarayar of Appan Tampuran is the one work which stands out from a host of historical novels produced in the Raman Pillai tradition. There is no authentic history in the novel—it is set against the Kerala of the Perumals—but what Tampuran seeks to show us is the society of those days, its manners and customs and how people spoke and dressed and lived and tackled their problems. There is nothing much outstanding about its plot and characters, but it makes for pleasant reading thanks to the interesting portrayals of men and things and a facile style, marred though a little in the attempt to recreate the language of so many centuries ago.

Though not equally famous as *Bhutarayar*, *Keralaputran* of Ambadi Narayana Poduval and *Keraleswaran* of T. Raman Nambisan also deserve specific mention. In fact they excel *Bhutarayar* in the compactness of their plots and in characterisation. *Keralaputran*, like *Bhutarayar*, is conceived against the age of the Perumals. *Cheraman Perumal* of Kappana Krishna

Menon is another novel which seeks to recapture that distant age. There is nothing in it to call history, but as a piece of fiction its manner of narration is one which keeps up suspense.

Sardar K. M. Panicker has made substantial contributions to Malayalam fiction in the form of historical novels. It might even seem that of all his contributions, covering as they do a wide range, his historical romances are the most important. He has five novels in this category to his credit: *Punarkottu Swarupam*, *Paranki Padayali*, *Dhumaketuvinte Udayam*, *Kerala Simham* and *Kalyanamal*. The first four novels deal with different epochs in the history of Kerala and the last, Akbar's time. An important trait which marks out his works from the rest is their fidelity to history. *Paranki Padayali* (The Portuguese Soldier) illumines many dark corners in the history of Kerala during the arrival of the Portuguese and *Dhumaketuvinte Udayam* (The Dawn of the Ill-omened Comet) tells us much about the circumstances which led Martanda Varma of Travancore seek the assistance of Hyder Ali of Mysore to resist the combined forces of kingdoms like Chempakasseri and Cochin. The events take place during the prince's career of conquest assisted by Marava soldiers.

Kerala Simham (The Lion of Kerala) which is Panicker's most famous work is a tale of patriotism and chivalry. It may be remembered that long before the struggle of 1857 there were brave souls in Kerala like Velu Tampi and Pazhassi Raja who sacrificed their all in resisting the British. Panicker's novel concerns the latter, a prince of North Kerala. Besides the course of events which, under the circumstances, could hardly avert a tragic outcome, Panicker protrays in vivid detail the social structure of the day. The circumstances resulting from the invasion of Tippu Sultan and the advent of the British in Malabar are treated from a correct perspective.

The story of *Kalyanamal* is the novelist's own creation, but it features with remarkable fidelity the history of Akbar's time and shows us the famous men and women who dominated the stage in that memorable age in India's history.

5. *Political and Social Novels*

The journalistic adventures of K. Ramakrishna Pillai

inspired the writing of political novels. The two major works which fall under this category are *Udayabhanu* and *Parappuram*, both by his friend and collaborator K. Narayana Kurukkal. First serialised in the columns of papers edited by them, and then published in book form, these novels created quite a stir at the time of their appearance. But today, because of their frequent allusions to the politics of the time no longer remembered or held important, they are hardly read. Nor are they outstanding as works of fiction.

There was a neglect in the output of social novels after the days of *Indulekha* and *Sarada*. The historical romance became the fashion of the day and, moreover, there was no competent critic of society to conceive significant novels. There is one work, however, which deserves mention: *Prem-amrutam* of C. V. Raman Pillai. It is not a social novel in the sense *Indulekha* is, but it shows us the Trivandrum of the author's time, the world of its officials and upper and middle classes.

As has been mentioned earlier, *Indulekha* brought in its wake many imitations, mostly weak and unimaginative. The subtle treatment of the erotic in the original lapsed into blatant obscenity in the imitations, and humour into buffoonery. *Parangodiparinayam* (*The Marriage of Parangodi*), a mordant satire, was born of the disgust for these imbecile productions. There were, however, a few works which, though not masterpieces, are still readable and enjoyable: *Snehalata* of Kannan Menon, *Hemalata* of T. K. Velu Pillai and *Kambola Balika* of N. K. Krishna Pillai. Karattu Achyuta Menon's *Virutan Sanku* is a good work in a lighter vein and K. M. Panicker's *Dorassini* is a satire featuring the undesirable effects of English education and imitation of western manners on the women of Kerala. The heroine, Madhavikkutty, has much to regret for her blind adoration of the trappings of western civilization.

Aphante Makal of Bhavatratan Nambutiripad is more of a short story at some length than a novel, but it is among the best-known works in Malayalam. Nambutiripad was a conscious literary artist and his unadorned style and progressive views on social reform mark it out as a significant contribution to fiction. It speaks of some undersirable marriage

practices obtaining in the Nambutiri community and the stir it created on its publication was such as could effect some considerable changes thereof.

6. *The Contemporary Novel: Takazhi, Kesavadev, Basheer, Pottekat and others*

For many years after Chandu Menon and Raman Pillai, there was a lull in the output of good fiction. The break came at last about two decades ago when young writers who were fed on English fiction until then were drawn to continental literature. They had in A. Balakrishna Pillai, a grand old man of letters, an able guide and tutor to show them the vitality and diversity of European fiction, to introduce them to masters like Balzac, Maupassant, Flaubert, Chekhov and Ibsen and to convince them how far Malayalam fiction lagged behind in relation to the achievements of Europe. He had no hesitation in condemning the inane stuff patterned on old models and pleaded with the new generation to get off the beaten track. The change, first noticed in authors like Takazhi and Kesavadev was far-reaching, for it became manifest in the entire course of subsequent fiction.

Attracted by the realistic approach of authors like Maupassant, Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai wrote his first novelettes *Patita Pankajam* (Fallen Lotus) and *Pratiphalam* (Reward) which, by their candid treatment of themes long held taboo in literature and the refutation of conventional norms of morality, offended the tastes of orthodox circles as nothing else had done before. Later he turned to the class question and produced works like *Talayodu* (The Skull) which features the tragic Communist insurrection of Vayalar in Travancore and *Tottiyute Makan* (Son of the Scavenger) and *Tendivargam* (The Beggar Class) both of which present the have-nots who stand on the lowest rungs of society. In *Tottiyute Makan* we find a scavenger couple striving hard to provide their son a calling better than theirs but, frustrated in their hopes, die in harrowing misery. And the son, disgusted with the squalor of his life and the cruelties to which his class is exposed, becomes the leader of their revolution and sacrifices himself for their cause.

In *Randidangazhi* (Two Measures of Paddy) Takazhi shows us another class of workers—the untouchable Parayas who toil in the rice fields of Kuttanad, the granary of Travancore. Koran is an obedient worker, but he would not have his master, Pushpaveli Chacko, rape Chiruta, his wife. He murders the voluptuary and the arms of law send him to prison. The reader is prone to suspect an element of the romantic in the story, especially when, towards the end, he is told that Koran commits Chiruta to the care of Chathan, one of her earlier lovers, and that he (Chathan), an honest soul who believes in the dictum *Oru Parayanu oru parayi*, that is, a *Parayan* (man) is entitled to a *Parayi* (woman) hands her back, her chastity honoured, to her husband on his release. But what the author seems to be more concerned about is the atmosphere of the novel, charged as it is with the disquiet of class conflicts and the realism of his characters which, to say the least, is intense. *Chemmeen* (Shrimps), a later and more famous work, is also conceived from this angle; in spite of the romantic features of the tale, the scenes and characters are undeniably true. The events have their setting in the huts of the fisherfolk who inhabit the Ambalapuzha-Trikkunnapuzha area of coastal Travancore, and the actors are those incredibly brave children of the sea who risk every moment of their lives for a precarious living. There is no class conflict in the novel—as a matter of fact, one is led to suppose that its author has freed himself from such obsessions—and, instead, we are shown a strange but authentic landscape where an unsophisticated people have their being, their quaint conceptions of love and morality, their endless struggle with the forces of nature and above all the untellable strivings of their heart with all its joys, fears and anxieties. The story itself is built upon one of their many superstitions: they believe, it is said, that a wife who commits adultery while her husband is away at sea brings down the wrath of *Kadalamma* (Mother Sea) on the innocent man. Whether the notion, by itself, is too romantic to be believed is another question, but we know that the conviction which the realism of its atmosphere carries is powerful enough to persuade the reader suspend any disbelief in its denouement. Besides, the criticism that the mixing up of the raw realism of life with

such irrational conceptions involves an element of self-contradiction and is not compatible with the norms of the modern novel would seem to lose much of its validity when we note that the tale concerns a people to whom superstitions are real and inescapable and the tragedy of its characters which they would interpret in terms of the wrath of 'Mother Sea' can also be interpreted, if we so choose, in terms of chance or of psychical forces which make the effect inevitable when the cause is there. Similarly, the conduct of Chathan in handing Chiruta back to her husband would no longer seem improbable when we note that conventions exercise a powerful influence in the behaviour patterns of the so-called uncivilised classes.

What Takazhi seeks to impress on his readers through his portrayals of the life of the community, governed as it is with conventions and superstitions and all those passions which man is heir to, is its disconcerting reality. And his success is due as much to the suggestive capacities of his style and ability to invest a tale with an authentic and appropriate atmosphere as to his subtle use of even superstitions to enhance its poignancy.

An equally eminent name in contemporary fiction is Kesavadev. Essentially a realist who draws upon the lives of common people for his incredibly wide range of themes, he has that rare ability to invest even the crudest and commonest of his characters with an ennobling humanity. A good example would be Pappu, hero of his novel *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter). The author has no hesitation in telling us, and we believe in him when we are so told, that all the traits held noble in man such as love and self-sacrifice can blossom forth in all their glory and purity in a character like Pappu, swamped be he and the like of him with the worst of human miseries. A revolutionary by temperament, he frets and fumes against the social order in which he finds himself, but finding that such collision with environments will take him nowhere, he returns to his old profession of plying the rickshaw. It happens one day that his vehicle knocks down a little orphan girl, and touched as much by its helplessness as by the idea of playing father to a child—he has none of his own—he takes it under his wings and lavishes on it every

paternal love and care. The bonds grow stronger and he strains every fibre of his being to give his daughter a sound education and see her settled comfortably in life. At last his dreams come true, for young and beautiful, she marries a man after her heart and becomes the mistress of his mansion. The energies which Pappu, grown old and haggard, could expend have run out, and still plying his rickshaw to make both ends meet, he is steadily eaten up by consumption. The last glimpse we have of him is as a half-dead being, coughing incessantly and dragging the remnants of his famished physique along the silent road which runs near his daughter's mansion, bent obviously on its course towards the infinite. It is a vision of haunting tragedy, and one is inevitably drawn to meditate on the affections given to the human heart and the ways of all flesh.

Most of Kesavadev's novels are deliberately designed to expose the rots which corrode the social body. His association with the working classes opened his eyes to their manifold miseries and his reactions took the form of *Ulakka* (The Pestle) a novel brimming with the spirit of revolt and revolution. His later work *Aarkkuvendi?* (For Whom?) shows us another facet of his genius—his analysis of the deeper forces of the human body which govern man's conduct. And his association with the professional stage led him to write *Nati* (The Actress), a bitter protest against the avarice of proprietors who prostitute art to swell their purse.

There is an uncommon vitality about the writings of Kesavadev. His idiom, his plots and his characters are not only forceful, they have a thought-provoking quality as well.

Vaikom Muhamed Basheer is more famous for his short stories than for his novels, but his works like *Balyakalasakhi* (The Childhood Mate) and *Ntuppappakkoranendarnu* (My Grandfather had an Elephant) entitle him to be remembered as an outstanding novelist also. The subject matter of his fiction is the circumstances of the society which gave him birth, and spiced though his portrayls are with a generous fund of humour, his digs at the foibles of that society reveal a certain measure of purposefulness for his writings. The *bapas* (fathers) and *ummas* (mothers) of his novels are engaging personalities, and the pen-pictures of domestic scenes

strewn throughout make an abiding impression on the reader. There are no elaborate plots in his novels—in fact they are short stories elongated—nor many episodes, but the characters presented by him as playing their preordained roles in the drama of life are so expertly drawn that they are as significant as any in much bigger works which permit enough room for their fuller delineation. Zuhra and Majid of his *Balyakalasakhi* are, in this respect, two of the most unforgettable characters ever created in Malayalam fiction. And the tragedies of their lives are such as to create the profoundest scepticism in thoughtful minds about the nature of human destiny. As children they are very much in each other's company, hailing as they do from neighbouring houses, but youth and traditional orthodoxy sever them, driving the girl into the arms of a man she does not like and the youth into strange places which hold promises of a living. But playthings of a cruel destiny, the disconsolate Zuhra is forced to leave her husband's home for her own, and Majid, with one leg torn off in an accident, breathes his last far away from kith and kin. Such events may not be quite so common in life, and yet the naturalness with which he unfolds them leaves no shadow of doubt about their possibility. The clouds of tragedy descend on the pair with such inevitability that one is forced to look upon the scene in abject helplessness and misery.

Ntuppappakkoranendarnu—the unpronounceable title is a full sentence which should read "*Ente* (my) *uppappakku* (grandfather) *oru* (an) *ana* (elephant) *undayirunnu* (had)"—is not so profound, being conceived in a lighter vein, but Basheer's characteristic humour has enough kick in it for the apostles of conservatism to take offence. Like his most other writings it deals with people living in the past chewing the cud of glories that were. The *umma* of this story is perhaps the best example; she is never tired of telling everyone around her that she is the *punnaramol* (darling daughter) of the rich Ana Makkar ('Elephant-Makkar', that is, Makkar who had elephants) and had never walked save with sandals on. Of course, not a shred of that old glory is left, but what a pleasure it still gives her to brood on memories! The pity is that her gloating over the past does not end with her, she teaches her

daughter also to be conscious of it even while the deep abyss of indigence is yawning before them and something urgent has to be done to avert it. It is then that Nissar Ahmed, a young man who had known much of the miseries of life, but managed in spite of them to secure a University Degree, arrives in the neighbourhood with his mother and sister. It is an enlightened family, happy in the freedom which springs from culture, and the friendship which the two families cultivate culminates in the enlightened civilizing the decadent old. Basheer is a conscientious artist and he spares no pains in polishing up his writings to the highest degree of perfection.

S. K. Pottekat is another eminent writer who is remembered as much for his short stories as for his novels. Though primarily a realist, his tales reveal, occasionally at least, the strong veins of a romantic imagination. He has written many novels—*Visha Kanyaka* (The Venomous Virgin), *Mudupadam* (The Veil), *Nadan Premam* (Folk Love), *Premasiksha* (The Punishment of Love), etc.—and every one of them is as good an illustration of his style and treatment as every other. Let us take his *Visha Kanyaka*, that unusual novel featuring man's fight against unrelenting Nature. A batch of enterprising Christians from Travancore arrive at Malabar in search of new pastures. They plan for a habitation in the malaria-infested jungles of Wayanad, and to that end, strain their nerve and muscle. But the anopheles is too powerful an enemy for them to overcome, and frustrated and their numbers reduced, they are beaten back by the virgin earth which they could just cover with the green of cultivated vegetation. The journeys which the immigrants undertake, their collective life and communal pleasures and their many woes and anxieties are sketched with such faithfulness and understanding that one is often reminded of Pearl Buck's *Good Earth*, that classic on China's peasant life. Pottekkat is more interested in the fortunes of the community than in individuals, and while he is all admiration for its noble traits like far-sightedness, perseverance and a stolid indifference towards setbacks, he is not blind to its weakness like too much fondness of liquor. The portrayals are realistic enough, for the story too is a real one, but it is not free from romantic

interludes like the love-affair between Anthony and Madhavi. The title of the book—the virgin earth with all its fertility is venomous, for it is hostile—also smacks of a romantic imagination. Of all the writers of Malayalam fiction, Pottekat has a most poetic style.

It is almost impossible to make a list of the novelists who are actively contributing to contemporary fiction, nor a catalogue of even the more important works in the category. There is widespread enthusiasm for the novel and keen competition among the new entrants especially for a name in its history. The following, however, are sure to find mention in any estimate of the contemporary novel: P. C. Kuttikrishnan *alias* Uroob, R. S. Kurup, Muttathu Varkey, Vettur Raman Nair, G. Vivekanandan and Ponjikkara Rafi. And titles like Uroob's *Ummachu* and *Sundaranmarum Sundarikalum*, both of which are sagas which throw much light on the political, social and cultural history of Malabar during the last few decades, Kururp's *Totti* (Scavenger) Varkey's *Ina Pravukal* (A Pair of Doves), Vivekanandan's *Kallichellamma*, Rafi's *Swargadutan*, Vasudevan Nair's *Nalukettu*, Parappurath's *Ninamaninja Kalppadukal* and Surendran's *Talam* are, as now estimated, additions of permanent value to the growing literature.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHORT STORY

1. *Early Writers*

The short story is a well-developed branch in Malayalam literature. It shows greater development than the novel. It was inspired, like most other forms in contemporary literature, by Western models, the early productions being plainly imitative of American authors like Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. The *rasas* which appealed most to the pioneers were humour and wonder, and they were prepared to go to any length to enhance the entertainment value of their productions. Inevitably they had often to overlook the probability of the events and even the social background against which they were conceived. Now that the short story has come of age and has gained considerably in depth and variety, these lapses would seem glaring, but we have to remember that they are the first efforts in an unfamiliar form and that they are not altogether without an innate charm.

Of the early writers, we may take note of five of them: Oduvil Kunjukrishna Menon, M.R.K.C. (C. Kunjirama Menon), Ambady Narayana Poduval, K. Sukumaran and E. V. Krishna Pillai. The contemporary story stands a long way off from their melodramatic productions; however, its indebtedness to the pattern set by them cannot be overlooked.

Nalu Kathakal (Four Stories) of Oduvil Kunjukrishna Menon is among the earliest collections in Malayalam. There is, in all these stories, a pair of lovers who long to be united but helpless on the face of obstacles. But the author sees to it that ultimately their longings culminate in happy union. The stories are long enough to be called novelettes, and though the atmosphere of Kerala is reflected in all of them, no social question is ever implied or discussed. Apparently Oduvil has not meant more by his stories than provide some interesting reading for leisure hours.

C. Kunjirama Menon, popularly known by the initials M.R.K.C., also has not meant more, but he, unlike Oduvil,

has chosen his themes from history. He was not concerned about the historical accuracy of his narratives—in fact, he has grafted many tales of exotic origin on to the ancient history of Kerala—but he was careful to embroider them with glowing accounts of the heroism of bygone generations. A few of his tales have a basis in historical reality, but the characters and events are fictitious. The vicissitudes in literary tastes have rendered his stories rather obsolete, but we have to concede that his ability to evoke the dead past and present to us the panorama of certain heroic epochs in the history of Kerala is commendable.

The stories of Ambady Narayana Poduval give the impression that their author was devoted more to beautifying the language than to the course of events or the realism of the characters. He uses all kinds of artifices, including rhyme which of course was not an unusual feature of the old style, to enhance the charm of both the narrative and the conversational parts of the stories. The episode, reported or imaginary, is narrated with such emphasis on the sound values of words that in the process much of the feeling it can hold is lost, and the story fails to create any deep impression. However, of all the early short stories in Malayalam, those of Poduval make pleasant reading even today.

Another important name among the early writers of the short story is K. Sukumaran. He has produced a far greater number of stories than any other writer and collected them in over five volumes under the title *Sukumara Katha Manjari*. It cannot be said that his themes are profound or his treatment artistic. Nor does he shed much light on the depth or variety of human life. In fact, most of them are cast in a triangular mould—a heroine, a group of rivals who fight for her and the ultimate success of the man whom she loves. Nevertheless the stories make interesting reading, thanks to the humour with which they are generously treated and the clever talk of the characters. His treatment of *sringara* often borders on the obscene, but such shortcomings might easily be overlooked in view of the extremely readable nature of his tales.

A beneficent influence which gave the short story a new turn during its formative period was that of E. V. Krishna

Pillai. An essayist of considerable originality and a playwright and humorist of rare eminence, he was a forceful writer of the short story too, and his contributions mark a milestone in its development. The stories first published in periodicals and subsequently collected in the four volumes of the series *Kelisoudham* brought a new experience to readers and provided a new model to writers for their qualities of scintillating humour, freshness of theme, and an original narrative style. He was also the first writer to touch upon the tragic aspects of life and move his readers to sympathise with the fortunes of his characters. *Premadasyam* (Servitude for Love) is one such story in which a disappointed lover finds happiness in serving his beloved, now married to another man. *Bashpavarsham* (Shower of Tears)—it is long enough to be called a novelette—is another story conceived in a similar vein. The stories of E. V. Krishna Pillai mark a definite progress over those of his forerunners in respect of character-drawing also. There are many characters in *Kelisoudham* who make a lasting impression.

Muthiringottu Bhavatratan Nambutiripad and S. Rama Varier, both E. V.'s contemporaries, have also enriched the short story. Nambutiripad drew his material from his own community. He wrote with a view to eradicating the many taints which gnawed at its root. *Atmahuti* (Self-Sacrifice), for instance, is a merciless attack on the dowry system which was a bane of the Nambutiri community. It is the tragic story of a grown-up girl committing suicide on the eve of her marriage to escape the shame of her parents' inability to pay her dowry. *Vidhavayute Vidhi* (The Lot of the Widow) is a portrayal of another malpractice—the sad fate of its widows. Rama Varier was a romantic, and he could emulate the English models conceived in the same vein rather successfully. The stories included in his collection *Bashpankuram* (The Budding of Tears) are fine specimens of romantic fiction.

2. *Contemporary Writers*

It is difficult to make an objective assessment of the present-day short story for various reasons. For one thing we do not have the testimony of the years as to which of the contem-

porary productions will endure and which not. Besides, the number of writers contributing at present is so large and their writings so prolific that a brief survey like this is perforce inadequate to do them justice. The only possible course would be to name the more famous among them and indicate the broad features of their writings.

Lalitambika Antarjanam marks a transitional phase in the evolution of the short story. She began as a romantic but is now a votary of realism, concerned chiefly, like Muthiringottu Nambutiripad with the ills which beset the Nambutiri community. (The surname *Antarjanam* is the feminine gender of Nambutiri). Her stories have the *illom* (the Nambutiri home) and the village for background and limited though her themes are, they are treated with much sympathy and a rare insight into human conduct. Her pen-pictures are poetic and there is a certain naïveté about her observations. But she exposes with singular force the foibles of her kinsmen and others who are grist to her mill. *Ambikanjali* (The Obeissance of Ambika), *Mudupadattil* (Behind the Veil), *Takarnna Talamura* (The Lost Generation), and *Kilivatilute* (Through the Window) are some of her well-known collections.

The rest of the writers—and they are important names in the field of the short story—are prominent novelists as well, and the characteristics of their stories are much the same as those of their novels which have been discussed in the preceding chapter. In fact they made their names first as short story writers and then only as novelists.

The early stories of Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai show the unmistakable impress of French realism which, as referred to elsewhere, was introduced to the younger generation of writers as a new direction with many possibilities by A. Balakrishan Pillai. They are immature and smack of Maupassant, but when he became sure of his ground he struck out with a new vigour and individuality. The distinguishing feature of Takazhi's fiction is his ability to create a whole atmosphere with a few broad strokes of his pen. For instance, his story *Vellappokkam* (Flood)—it treats of the annual floods at Kuttnad in Central Travancore—is a symbolic evocation of the terror of the flood: a lone dog mourning helplessly from the roof of a sinking house. His mastery in creating a climate

for his story is admirably sustained by an engaging style which disarms any scepticism his readers may have in believing in him. Oftentimes we come across perverted specimens among his creations, but the psychology behind their doings is convincing enough. He knows no reservations and is blunt when he holds the torch along the labyrinths of sex, so much so that the puritans among his readers may frown on him, may find his accounts rather morbid and even repulsive, but there is no gainsaying their power and realism. It is no gentle breeze that fans his creations, but tornados of a mysterious force. One is prone to think of him as more of a surgeon who splits open the hearts of men and women to let loose the forces pent-up therein in all their primeval energy than as a poet who delights in the subtle intimations of the beautiful which play on the surface. He has published hundreds of stories during the last two decades and has collected the most important of them in *Changatikal* (Friends), *Inquilab* (Revolution), *Makalute Makal* (Daughter's Daughter), *Pratikshakal* (Hopes), *Pativrata* (The Chaste Wife), *Ghoshayatra* (Procession), *Adiyozhukkukal* (Undercurrents) and *Pratijna* (The Vow).

Kesavadev began his career as a worker among labourers. Naturally, it is the theme of the working classes and the have-nots which find pride of place in his earlier stories. However, it did not take long for him to break through his proletarian obsessions and view humanity as one compact whole. The poor and the oppressed are still his characters, but it is not so much the individual and his fortunes which now concern him as the complexity of the social order with its many dilemmas. He probes into the lives of individuals and families which symbolise that social order and spotlights their problems with such understanding and candour that the sympathy of the reader flows forth to him spontaneously. Poverty, crime, ignorance and struggle for existence—all find a place in his stories, but the squalor is there not for its own sake, it is brought in to highlight the human warmth which even the most miserable of his characters is capable of. His protest against social myths is uncompromising. And the myth of morality, to him, is the worst of all. Society, in his view, is a tyrannical machine. Man is left with but only one choice; to smash it, if he does not want to be pulverised under its

wheels. And smash it he must, according to Kesavadev. As for the myth of morality, what indeed is it? It is nothing but immorality in secrecy.

Many of his stories reveal a psychological bias. A good instance would be the Koran of his story, *Meenkaran Koran* (The Fisherman Koran). A terribly repulsive creature with 'little red eyes, thick black lips and elongated teeth which dance behind those lips', he could make the whole beach shiver before him as he swirled his oars. But Kesavadev could trace behind this rough exterior a rich fount of tender affections. There are not many writers in Kerala who are so subtle in the treatment of such themes. The progress from cause to effect is natural and is always convincing. Collections like *Pravaham* (The Current), *Ushas* (The Dawn), *Deenamma*, *Bhavi Varan* (The Bridegroom-to-be) and *Jivitachakram* (Cycle of Life) contain his best stories.

Vaikom Muhamed Basheer is an introvert as well as a critic of society. What he sees and feels as a member of his community he translates into his stories, and in the process, exposes the basic contradictions which characterise life everywhere. There is an undercurrent of sorrow in most of his stories and this, one is tempted to suppose, springs from his own experience of life. In his story *Jivitam* we hear him say: "...Man sees it all with a pained heart. Endless rivalries, infinite misery; hunger, disease, jealousy; struggle for power, the laughter of the proud, the lament of the afflicited—indeed what contradictions!" An atmosphere of sheer helplessness envelops the majority of his characters though, of course, that is not what he would like them to succumb to. Life is something to be fought for and lived out in its entirety. It is what man has made of man that grieves him and invests his tales with a vengeful tragedy. But even the saddest of his tales is treated with a measure of humour which, while relieving them of morbidity, contributes in a subtle manner to the cumulative effect of the whole. In fact, he is very much of a detached person and that is what enables him to delineate life as a whole, its tragedy as well as its comedy. However, an impression gains ground that he takes a sadistic pleasure in portraying the disintegration of his community and its families. Among the more important collections of his are:

Janmadinam (Birthday), *Viddhikalute Swargam* (Fools' Paradise), *Muchittu Kalikkarante Makal* (The Gambler's Daughter), *Ormakkurippu* (Notes from Memory), *Pavappettavarute Vesya* (Poor Men's Prostitute), *Viswavikhyatamaya Mukku* (The World-famous Nose) and *Visappu* (Hunger). Incidentally, he was the first to start the popular feature of most periodicals, the serial story. *Aanavariyum Ponkurišum* and *Stalathe Pradhana Divyan* (The First Divine of the Locality) are two of his stories which became famous through the columns of periodicals.

Ponkunnam Varkey is another important story-teller of the day. He delights in exposing the underhand doings of society and his treatment is both impassioned and provocative. An important difference between Basheer and Varkey is that, while the former is suggestive and sarcastic, the latter is loud and outspoken. He flings his tales, as it were, on one's face and shouts with uncontrolled wrath against those who created the have-nots in society. Very often his advocacy borders on flagrant propaganda, but he deserves to be excused, for he is sincere. There is a lot of feeling in his stories, and a lot of the subjective in the telling of them. The chief targets of his attack are the priests and the landlords and all those who hold the reins of power. His treatment of sex is often in the raw and even while it borders on the obscene, the impression would still persist that it is all so true. He has many collections to his credit: *Vikara Sadanam* (The Mansion of Emotions), *Aniyara* (Behind the Scene), *Antithiri* (The Evening Lamp), *Nivedanam* (Supplication), *Aaramam* (The Garden), *Ezhakal* (The Poor and the Lowly), and *Pottiya Izhakal* (Broken Threads).

In the chapter on novels we saw that S. K. Pottekkat is a romantic. In his stories, however, he conforms more to the canons of realism. An untiring traveller, he sets his stories in the remote corners of the world and presents strange characters, all of which sound rather unfamiliar in Malayali ears, but the themes evince emotive features common to all humanity and, as such, are veridical. And what society is there which does not have its woes, cruelties and hypocrisies? A good proportion of his stories concern such human frailties and their universality imparts to them the effect of hearts speaking to hearts from immense distances. His treatment is poetic which, despite the realism of the tale, elevates his writings

to a romantic plane. In fact, reading his stories, one often gets the impression of reading a piece of romantic poetry. He is particular about his plots which, as a rule, are ample. Most of them abound in interesting situations and culminate in a note of surprise. *Rajamalli* (Caesalpinia Flowers), *Padmaragam* (The Gem), *Nisagandhi* (Blossoms of the Night), *Manimalika* (The Bejewelled Mansion) and *Rangamandapam* (The Stage) are the more famous among his collections.

Karoor Neelakanta Pillai is another important writer. His stories, as a rule, are tinged with his own experience of life, but they are told with a detachment which is remarkable. He is not excited when he tells a story, nor does he seek to persuade his readers, but there is a strange eloquence about the irony which underlies it. He is not a critic of the social order, nor is he concerned with the human psyche, but his tales are nonetheless human and true. There is much warmth and candour in his depiction of the common people, especially teachers—he was himself a teacher to begin with—whose lives hold for him a perennial appeal. The bulk of the raw material of his stories, however, is drawn from the village—the farmer, the merchant, the tea-shop proprietor, the priest and the physician; Nair, Christian, Paraya and Pulaya; gambling, ploughing, harvesting. It is indeed a curious assortment of personae and pictures, intensely human and unquestionably authentic. There are no elaborate plots for his stories, but even the slightest of his episodes is adequate for the portrayal of man's conflict with relentless environments. It is his humanism which distinguishes his stories from most others. *Karoor Kathakal* (Stories of Karoor), *Iruttil* (In Darkness), *Grahanayika* (Mistress of the House), *Melvilasam* (Address), *Astrologer*, *Poovan Pazham* (The Plantain Fruit), *Oru Pidi Mannu* (A Handful of Earth) and *Ambalaparambil* (In the Temple Premises) are his important collections.

P. C. Kuttikrishnan began contributing to the short story since early in life, but it was under his present pen-name 'Uroob', that he shot into fame. He draws his materials from the middle-classes of Malabar. A fine sense of humour, a facile style and an undertone of irony are the distinguishing features of his stories. He is true to the social background of his tales, and they are unfolded convincingly. Indeed there

are not many stories in Malayalam truer to the life of the middle classes than Uroob's. His style, which is replete with provincialisms and the mannerisms of the classes and communities to which the characters belong, has an exquisite fluency and, in the utterances of those characters we have a mirror which reveals the deepest recesses of their hearts. There are no artificial paddings designed to enhance the effect of the tales, their naturalness is their greatest strength. And his sincerity adds to it substantially. His collections *Tenmullukal* (Nectareal Thorns) *Navonmesham*, (A New Spirit), *Turannitta Jalakam* (Open Window), *Neela Velicham* (Blue Light)), *Neerchalukal* (Streams), *Katirkkattakal* (Sheafs of Corn) and *Velutha Kutti* (White Boy) are well known in contemporary fiction.

The short story is making rapid strides and is undoubtedly one of the most flourishing forms in contemporary literature. What has been attempted in the foregoing account is only to indicate the broad features of this form and a few outstanding names in the field. There are many more names who will figure in any assessment of the modern short story: K. Saraswati Amma, Nagavallil R. S.. Kurup, Vettoor Raman Nair, Muttathu Varkey, E. M. Kovoor, Prof. Joseph Mundasseri, Ponjikkara Rafi, T. Padmanabhan, N. P. Mohamed, N. Govindankutty, Joseph Cheruvathor, Jose Chalangad, D. M. Pottekkat, Pamman and several others. We have come in possession of a good many stories which reflect all facets of life, of Kerala especially. Stories which have won prizes in national and international competitions also have been written by present-day writers. On the whole the short story is the most virile and prolific form in contemporary literature.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DRAMA

1. *The Stage, a Late Development*

It might seem suprising that the drama, an important branch of any literature, has not been referred to until we come down to the contemporary phase. The reason is simple enough: there was no drama worth the name until about three quarters of a century ago. Of course, there was the Koodiyattam (the staging of Sanskrit plays) since very early times, and the Krishnanattam and the Kathakali, but these art-forms, being what they are, can hardly be brought under the category of drama. The one explanation for the sad neglect of the stage would be that the poets were too fond of the Kathakali to go in for any other dramatic forms. The repertoire of Sanskrit was always before them, and they were not averse to translating, adapting and imitating a great part of its literature. But they left the drama alone for the sole reason that they found the Kathakali more to their liking.

We have, however, to take note of the dramas which the Christians of Kerala produced since their coming into contact with the Portuguese. Plainly imitative of Western models, these dramas presented European or Christian themes and featured, not infrequently, heroes of European history too. Thus *Genoa Natakam*, *Caralman Natakam*—it is about Emperor Charlemagne—and *Napolean Charitram* were on historical themes, and *Yakobu Natakam* on the Old Testament theme of Jacob, the patriarch. Some of these works exhibit features of the Westeren drama like the development of conflicts, the climax, the solution, the moulding of characters etc., but on the whole, they are unimaginative productions. The Christians of Central Kerala used to enact these plays—the style of acting too was Western—but they failed to attract any wider audience. Nor could these productions influence the dramatic literature or the stage of later years.

The story of the Malayalam drama begins in 1882 which

year saw Kerala Varma Valia Koyil Tampuran's translation of *Sakuntalam*. It was taken up for the stage soon enough, and the pattern it set, which was in accordance with classical traditions, proved an influence with the subsequent evolution of the stage.

When once the poets came by a model, and a good one at that, they were seized with the usual desire to imitate. Soon there was a flood of translations—*Janaki Parinayam* and *Uttararamacharitam* by Chathukkutti Mannadiar, *Malati Madhavam* by Kottarathil Sankunni, *Malavikagnimitram* by A. R. Raja Raja Varma, and so on.

And that encouraged the poets to bring out original works of their own, after the classical models. The earliest attempt in this line was *Kalyani Natakam* by Kochunni Tampuran (1855-1926). It is both an original work and a realistic one, conceived against the background of contemporary society. The dramatist seems to have derived clues from English plays also, but with all that, it was not much of a success. The reason is obvious: Kochunni Tampuran was not much of a dramatist.

Of the other independent works of the early period mention may be made of Kunhikkuttan Tampuran's *Chandrika*, K. C. Kesava Pillai's *Lakshmi Kalyanam* and Kandattil Verghese Mappila's *Ebrayakkutty*. The last mentioned is woven round the Old Testament theme of Joseph—the title means's Hebrew Boy—and is perhaps the first one in Malayalam to be based exclusively on the pattern of the English drama. There were also some curious productions on imaginary themes and events of topical importance. For example, Changanasseri Ravi Varma required no better theme than a *Kavi Sammelan*, a meeting of poets, at Kottayam in 1892 for the composition of his play *Kavisabharanjanam* and Vayaskara Moosu, the origin and growth of the paper *Malayala Manorama*, a forum of the poets of those days, for his *Manorama Vijayam* (1891). The public of those days seem to have enjoyed these plays, but when, in course of time, the themes ceased to be topical, their importance also waned. Moreover, there is not much drama in them to sustain them as literature.

Yet other dramatists chose puranic themes for their productions. They too turned to Sanskrit for patterns; still they

evinced enough imagination to treat their tales rather freely. The more important works in this vein are *Subhadrarjunam* of Tottakkat Ikkavamma, *Lakshmanasangam* of Kunhikkuttan Tampuran, *Uma Vivaham* of Kochunni Tampuran and *Bhagavad Dootu* of Naduvathu Achan Nambutiri. There are fine poetic passages in all these works, and they appealed to the connoisseurs of those days, but as dramas, it has to be said, they are feeble.

There were also some translations and adaptations of English plays. The first major work in this sphere is the *Kalahinidamanakam*, a translation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* by Kandattil Verghese Mappila. In his preface to the work he tells us that his sole intention in bringing it out is to show to his contemporaries who do not know English the pattern of the drama in that language.

It will be evident from the foregoing account that the dramas of the early period fall under two heads: translations from Sanskrit and English and original works on puranic and imaginary themes. The enthusiasm for the drama was so widespread in those days that in a short while over two hundred works were produced and even women took to writing. There was, for instance, Tottakkat Ikkavamma, author of *Subhadrarjunam*, who introduces her play with a challenge:

> Is it that for the glorious muse
> we (women) are incompetent?

On the whole the writing of dramas was an obsession with the litterateurs those days.

The first attempt in Kerala to evolve a stage was also made during this period. The pioneer was a well-known actor, Tiruvattar Narayana Pillai. The dramatic troupe which he organised, the *Manomohanam*, toured the length and breadth of Kerala staging plays like *Sakuntalam*, *Janaki Parinayam* and *Uttararama Charitam*. The enthusiasm which his shows whipped up was so great that, fascinated by the idea of gaining easy recognition as dramatists, more and more writers came forward with new works.

Indeed there was a plethora of them, but most, as it turned out, were of poor quality. The critics of the day frowned on

the flippant pieces and there were bitter condemnations. But all that was of no avail until a bomb-shell burst from an unexpected quarter—the satire *Chakki Chankaram* by Munshi Rama Kurup.

It is evident from the very title of the work—names like Chakki (the heroine) and Chankaran (the hero) are thoroughly unfashionable—that the author's sole intention was to make fun of the poetasters who indulged in swelling the tide of third-rate works. The plot is slender: Chankaran loves Chakki and Sukumaran loves Madhavi and the love affairs culminate after the inviolable Sanskritic tradition, in marriages. But what the satirist wanted was only a peg on which to hang his observations on the contemporary drama and the obsession with poets to produce more and more of them. And for this, the plot was quite adequate. The first of its kind in Malayalam, the satire went home, and it not only stemmed the tide of unimaginative productions, but opened the eyes of dramatists and their audience to the glaring shortcomings of existing ones and the need to rectify them.

There was also an attempt to translate Shakespeare into a kind of blank verse. The pioneer was Dewan Bahadur A. Govinda Pillai who brought out *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. But it so happened that these versions failed to evoke any popular enthuiasm.

The closing years of the last century and the early years of the present were, on the whole, a period of widespread enthusiasm for the drama. It bridged a gap in the cultural life of the people and held before the poets a new literary form with immense possibilities. It cannot, of course, be said that their contributions were of any enduring value to literature, but the enthusiasm they created was essential for the building up of sounder stage traditions.

In course of time, and especially after the days of Tiruvattar Narayana Pillai, people became apathetic towards plays cast in the mould of Sanskrit. What now fascinated them most were musical plays patterned after the Tamil stage which was then becoming popular in Kerala. Dramatic troupes from Tamilnad used to tour the region pretty frequently and, influenced by their productions, many musical plays came to be composed in Malayalam. Of this category *Harischandra*

Charitam of Chakrapani Varier, *Naishadham* of T. C. Achuta Menon and *Sadarama* of K. C. Kesava Pillai are noted for their musical and literary qualities.

2. *Comedies: C. V. Raman Pillai and E. V. Krishna Pillai*

Meanwhile there was a parallel move at Trivandrum, among the staff and students of the Maharaja's College, to evolve a new kind of drama. Votaries of the English play, they found in Sheridan and Goldsmith masters worthy of emulation and in C. V. Raman Pillai, the well-known novelist who was then a member of the staff, a guide to put them in the way. Raman Pillai was as much fond of the stage as he was of the historical romance, and he had already produced as early as in 1885 a play entitled *Chandramukhi Vilasam* with the staff and students of the College and some officials of the State. Though conceived on the model of the Sanskrit drama, it marked a major deviation from the rest in that it contained, like the English comedy, much criticism of contemporary society. The story is woven round a young woman of an aristocratic family of Trivandrum, but its chief interest lies in Raman Pillai's digs at some social pests—the teacher of the Tiruvatira (a group-dance of the fair sex), the marriage *dallal* (broker), rogues and Don Juans.

There was a break of over a score of years before Raman Pillai produced his second play, a comedy, *Kuruppilla Kalari* (1909). Though, intrinsically, not of the first order, it marks another important step in the development of the drama—being the first comedy in the language. It registers a complete break with the Sankritic tradition in that prose is the exclusive medium; and with all its affinity towards Sheridan and Goldsmith, it was still true to contemporary society. In fact there was a big furore over the play at Trivandrum, which city with its people seeking cover for their hypocrisies under the new-fangled ways of living ushered in by English education, provides the backdrop for the play. The leading character is a bluestocking—she bears the fantastic nick-name *Panchamruta Kochamma* ('Ambrosial Lady')—a representative, albeit a caricature, of the new class of English-educated women. With a husband to dance to her tune and her flaunting of the

English tongue in place and out of place, the picture she presents is indeed funny. She is a leader of her sex and her colleagues of the Women's Association too are of the same type. The other characters also are drawn from real life: Bhaskara Menon, the henpecked husband, Peishkar Madhavan Pillai, a retired official, Krishna Menon, the leader of *bhaktas* (devotees), Kittu Panicker Asan who delights in reciting *slokas* at the slightest provocation and the office-bearers of the Women's Association. The title of the comedy, incidentally, has an interesting connotation: the society in which people like *Panchamruta Kochamma* figure at the helm of affairs is like a *kalari* (military gymnasium where fencing is taught) without its Kurup (master).

There was again a break after *Kuruppilla Kalari*, but when C. V. resumed writing, play after play rolled forth from his pen with remarkable speed and facility. The following are his more important comedies in this last and most fertile phase: *Pandatte Pachan* (The Former Pachan), *Kaimalassante Kadassikkai* (Kaimal's Last Stand), *Kuruppinte Tirippu* (Kurup's Subterfuge), *Butler Pappan*, *Doctorkku Kittiya Micham* (The Doctor's Net Gain) and *Tentinamkottu Harischandran*. All these plays are comedies of the type of *Kuruppilla Kalari* with a lot of fun poked at human specimens who exemplify the hollow affectations of urban life. It cannot, however, be said that Raman Pillai thought highly of the comedy. A few hours' entertainment, it would seem, was all that he expected of it, and this it yielded in abundant measure. Most of them, it is reported, were written for specific occasions like anniversaries, and naturally, he did not expect them to survive the years as serious literature. It has also to be said that 'farce' is the term usually applied to these productions.

But one serious consequence of his enthusiasm for the stage was the laying of the foundation for sound histrionic traditions. Himself a good actor, he spared no pains in discovering and training up fresh talent from among holders of University degrees particularly. The important occasions which called for the staging of his comedies were the anniversaries of the Trivandrum National Club and of the Malayala Samajam of the University College and the birthday of the Maharaja.

After C. V. Raman Pillai, the mantle of playwright-cum-

producer fell on E. V. Krishna Pillai, one of the most talented humorists and actors of Kerala. To him it was the anniversary of the Sri Chithira Tirunal Library of Trivandrum which coincided with the birthday of the Maharaja that provided the immediate incentive to write plays, and soon enough a convention was established that one new play should be produced every year. The upshot of it all was the enrichment of Malayalam with a good many comedies and the training up of many amateur actors from among the educated classes. The mould in which he cast his comedies is much the same as Raman Pillai's, but in the delineation of plots and characters, he is more realistic, and in humour-content more subtle. The more important among his works are *B. A. Mayavi*, *Pennarasu Nadu* (Land of Amazons), *Pranaya Commission* (Commission on Love), *Kurupinte Daily* (Kurup's Daily) and *Vismruti* (Oblivion).

All the aforesaid plays are comedies, and hardly anything more than a few hours' entertainment was expected of them. But there was, at the same time, the demand for plays conceived on a more serious vein and to meet it both the masters had to bestow some attention. Raman Pillai did not write any serious play, nor did other writers come forward, but instead he permitted the dramatisation of his famous romances—*Martanda Varma*, *Dharmaraja*, *Ramaraja Bahadur* and *Premamrutam*—and their production under his guidance. Krishna Pillai kept up the tradition by writing and producing original historical plays. He wrote three tragedies—*Sitalakshmi*, *Raja Kesavadas*, and *Iravikkutti Pillai*—and the contrast they provided to the popular comedy was indeed refreshing. There is much use of Shakespearean techniques in these plays and, though they have many shortcomings when judged by modern standards, there is no doubt that they met an urgent need of the time and contributed to the balanced development of the modern drama.

The comedy and the tragedy, both of which had their first protagonists in these two masters, assumed greater profundity and variety as the years passed by and the prose drama became a major cultural pursuit of all ranks. Of those who enriched the comedy, mention may be made of three contemporary playwrights—N. P. Chellappan Nair, T. N. Gopina-

than Nair and M. G. Kesava Pillai. Fundamentally a humorist of the E. V. Krishna Pillai School, N. P. Chellappan Nair made his comedies more democratic in the sense that he linked his themes with the broader life of the people. The very titles of his comedies—*Lt. Nani*, *Atom Bomb*, *Minnal Pranayam* (Lightning Love), *Pranaya Jambavan* (The Great Lover) etc., —would indicate the strain in which they are conceived, and, being ideal as entertainment pieces, they are widely staged. M. G. Kesava Pillai has not written much, but his comedies like *Just a Peg*, *Sambandhalochana* (Marriage Negotiation) and *Pramani Pattam* (The Leader's Mantle) are well known on the Trivandrum stage.

T. N. Gopinathan Nair's forte, too, is the comedy. but he has handled serious themes also, psychological ones particularly. He has many plays to his credit, the more popular ones on the stage being *Nilavum Nizhalum* (Moonlight and Shadows), *Vidhiye Vidhi* (What a Fate!) *Pookkari* (The Flower Maid), *Pratidhwani* (Echo), *Akavum Puravum* (Inside and Out), *Anachchadanam* (The Unveiling) and *Parivartanam* (Transformation). There is not much of social criticism in his plays, but in the drawing up of his plot and characters he is ahead of his forerunners, being more realistic.

3. *Historical, Puranic and Political Plays*

We have already referred to the attempts made by Raman Pillai and Krishna Pillai to enhance the seriousness of the stage and instanced the latter's works, *Sitalakshmi*, *Raja Kesavadas* and *Iravikkutti Pillai*, as the first steps taken in this direction. The contributions of the Kainikkara Brothers, Padmanabha Pillai and Kumara Pillai, are the next major ones in the attempt to enrich this branch of drama. The important works of Padmanabha Pillai are *Calavariyile Kalpapadapam* (The Celestial Tree of Calvary), *Agnipanjaram* (Nest of Fire), *Velu Tampi Dalava* and *Vidhi Mandapam* (The Stage of Destiny) —all of them tragedies. The theme of the first work is the crucifixion of Christ and is based partly on gospel accounts and partly on Marie Corelli's *Barabas*. It is conceived in a solemn vein, and when it was first staged, it struck a refreshingly serious note amidst all the flippant farces which held the stage.

Velu Tampi Dalava is a historical play woven round the tragic end of one of the earliest patriots of India to rise in revolt against the British. The rest of Padmanabha Pillai's plays have a sociological bias and unravel how the psychical forces latent in man govern the course of his life and decide his ultimate destiny.

Kumara Pillai's works are also conceived on a higher plane and discuss the fundamental values of life. The more important among them, *Harischandran* and *Mohavum Muktiyum* (Temptation and Redemption) are on puranic themes and in them he discovers untapped potentialities for the exposition of conflicts to which idealists are led, riding the tide of passions. Thus Harischandra sacrifices his all for the upholding of truth and Rukmangada fights the tide of passion to gain the ultimate end of redemption. The situations are immensely dramatic and he exploits all of them to the fullest advantage. There is a touch of Tagorean symbolism in *Mohavum Muktiyum*. *Manimangalam* appeals to a wider audience, for its theme is social and realistic. And in *Veshangal* (Masks), another social play, he presents men and women as so many masks endeavouring to smother the spark of the spirit, which, in fact, is the active principle of their being. He contends that "admist all this show of individual freedom and the quest for pleasure there operate some unwritten and inviolable moral forces in the life of the family", and indeed, he convinces his audience of his contention.

Yet another feature of the modern drama which became evident early enough is its adaptation for purposes of social reform. True, there was much criticism of society in the early comedies, but the humour and ridicule which characterised them were not of the type that permitted them being taken seriously. The later works, however, treated social ills more seriously, and the tragedy which looms over all of them was too much within the pale of experience to be brushed aside as imaginary. The first works of this kind came from the Nambutiri community, from its younger generation especially, which no longer tolerated the antiquated ways of orthodoxy and the malpractices sanctioned by tradition. V. T. Raman Bhattatirippad's *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku* (From the Kitchen to the Stage) and M. P. Bhattatiri's *Ritumati* (Virgin)

are memorable productions in this category. The social reformation effected by these plays was unprecedented: the exposition in public of the inhuman treatment meted out to the women of the community by the custodians of orthodoxy compelled them to reform their ways. The first play is a merciless indictment of the dowry system and the practice of young girls being married off to old men; and the second, on the taboo attached to educating girls, and even to permitting them dress properly. They serve admirably to "purge with tears the foul practices which corrode the community".

The next development was the adoption of political ideologies as operative principles of the drama. The struggle for political freedom unleashed a tendency to question every authority including the wielders of economic power. The landlord was the first target of attack, and such of those playwrights who sought to propagate the new economic ideologies seized upon the landlord-*versus*-tenant theme for their productions. *Pattabakki* (The Landlord's Dues) of K. Damodaran is the first major play to treat of this question. It is not a political play in the strict sense of the term—it features only the conflict between a tenant and his landlord against the socio-economic background of Kerala—but the implication is that political power upholds vested interests and, as such, is a party in the conflict. The hero is a labourer who could hardly make both ends meet by his earnings, and driven to stealing, is put behind bars by the arm of law. The agent of the landlord now harasses his sister, who, though she resists his advances for a while, breaks down finally. But he would not have her for long and, thrown out by him into the streets, she turns a prostitute to earn her living. The brother is finally released from jail and, together with his sister who is reclaimed, he launches out on a career of fighting for their class. The intention of the dramatist is to drive home to the audience some of his political views, that poverty and dependence on the higher-ups breed immorality, that an equalitarian society can alone eradicate it, and that by revolution alone can such a state of affairs be brought about. The story is unfolded cleverly and the dénouement carries a certain measure of conviction. Being based on the life of the common people its import is clear to a wide audience, and the

conflicts are portrayed with a power calculated to excite their imagination.

Kuttu Krishi (Collective Farming) of Edasseri Govindan Nair is another well-known play with a socio-poitical message. It presents the farmers of Malabar, Hindu and Muslim, coming together on the common platform of identical problems, forgetting the many dissensions which keep the two communities apart. It seeks to impress on the audience that ultimately it is the economic question which counts and not communal ones. To prove the point we are shown two families belonging to the two communities pooling their lands and resources for joint farming. The picture of the children of the soil is realistic, and there is much poetry in their dialogues as well as in their lives.

There are a few other plays which have a direct bearing on politics, but most of them being primarily propagandist, have failed to impress as dramas. *Pratima* (Statue) of K. Ramakrishna Pillai, however, is a work which has a claim to be remembered in literature. The background to the story is provided by the political unrest which rocked Travancore before it got Responsible Government. The wrath of a people against despotism sets the tone, and to symbolise that wrath before which despotism crumbles, we are shown the crumbling down of a statue—the statue of the despot—no sooner than it was set up.

It would be difficult to make even a passing reference to all the political plays which now hold the stage, but of the major productions during the last one decade mention may be made of *Munnottu* (Forward), *Madyapani* (Drunkard) and *Pradhana Mantri* (Prime Minister) by P. Kesavadev, *Tottilla* (Not Yet Vanquished) by Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai, and *Jetakkal* (The Winners) by Ponkunnam Varkey.

4. *Ibsen and the Malayalam Drama*

The most important development in the recent history of the Malayalam drama is the coming into being of what are called problem plays. Apart from their entertainment value, which often may not be high, they have a message for the reader and the spectator alike, for they compel them to think

about the inner problems of man, the nature of his thoughts and ideas and how psychical forces operate in the lives of individuals and families. The master who showed the way for this kind of drama in the West was Ibsen and, strangely enough, it was none other in Kerala also. It may be recalled that Ibsen created quite a stir in Europe with his bold analysis of social evils and revolutionised the whole concept of drama by their effective exposition on the stage. The medium of English brought him to Kerala, and soon enough, he was hailed by the younger generation of dramatists as their preceptor. How effectively to put a theme across to the audience was the chief lesson his Malayali disciples took from him, and that, it would seem, was what Ibsen too cared for.

By far the most successful attempt in Malayalam in adapting Ibsen's techniques was that of N. Krishna Pillai. His *Bhagna Bhavanam* (Broken House) bears the imprint of the master's technique, and *Kanyaka* (Virgin), of his themes. The first play, as the title indicates, is the story of the disintegration of a family. Though the causes are inherent in social behaviour and individual psychology, yet, besides them, a malevolent fate from which escape is impossible would seem to dog the characters. Their longings are compelling and must be realised if tragedy is to be averted, but social morality and the hidden hand of fate are too cruel to let them have their way. The eldest daughter of the house loves one man, but is driven into the hands of another whom she cannot either love or like; to the second daughter life is an endless misery, for her husband cannot give her any happiness; and the third is enmeshed in her passion for an insincere lover. No worse tragedy can befall the head of that family and the good woman of the house, and what is worse, they are helpless in its face. And catastrophe overtakes the family with relentless inevitability. The conflicts in the play spring from the interaction of social forces and individual passions, and the genius of the playwright lies in bringing them together naturally and convincingly. On the whole it provides much food for thought and the catharsis it effects compels one to contemplate the mysterious forces amidst which he has his home.

Kanyaka features the inherent and untamed passions of

the human heart and their incompatibility with the conventional norms of social behaviour. We have in this work a thirty-year old woman, the heroine, holding a high job and commanding the prestige that goes with it. But one fine morning we find her resign that position and leave the locality —to be married to her peon. It may seem incredible that a cultured woman, and an official to boot, should do so, but the dramatist leaves us in no doubt about its possibility. And what is more, he convinces us that that is the most natural thing under the circumstances. The married state which is a psychological and physical necessity of the sex was denied her for long because of social vanities. But her heart always cried for the same, and when circumstances offered themselves, she paid the lesser price of social ridicule for the higher value of giving a meaning to her life.

Of the other plays of N. Krishna Pillai, *Balabalam* (Trial of Strength), *Anuranjanam* (Reconciliation) and *Azhimukhathekku* (Towards the Sea) deserve mention. The theme of *Balabalam* is a familiar one—mother-in-law *versus* daughter-in-law. But the dramatist's approach is from the point of view of a psychologist. Why indeed should there be such a struggle, and how is it that it is so universal and inescapable? All his plays are conceived in this spirit of enquiry and exposition and they stand out admist the countless farces which infest the stage with their frivolous themes and sentimental melodrama. Indeed his has been a purposeful attempt to enhance the importance of the drama as a medium to discuss the higher questions of life and correct a tendency towards the shallow and the burlesque.

There have been significant additions to the problem play in recent years. *Kathabeejam* (The Seed of a Story) of Basheer, *Avan Veendum Varunnu* (He Comes Again) of C. J. Thomas, and *Karavatta Pasu* (The Cow Gone Dry) of K. T. Muhammed are plays conceived in the same serious vein.

There have also been translations and adaptations of Ibsen's plays. C. Narayana Pillai adapted *Rosmersholm* for his *Mullakkal Bhavanam*, T. N. Gopinathan Nair, *Enemy of the People* for *Janadrohi* and E. M. Kovoor, *Wild Duck* for *Kattu Taravu*. Among the earliest translations is that of *Ghosts* by A. Balakrishna Pillai and A. K. Gopala Pillai.

5. *Musical Plays, One-Act Plays, Radio Plays*

Reference has also to be made of the musical plays—they are actually plays in prose interspersed with songs—which command much popularity nowadays. These productions differ from the earlier ones in that the use of music is more appropriate to the situations and does not detract from their realism, and the themes are not puranic but social. All kinds of contemporary questions are posed with as much naturalness as in any serious prose-play and their solutions thrashed out through the interplay of motives. The plays of Toppil Bhasi, *Ningal Enne Communistakki* (You Made Me a Communist), *Visakkunna Karimkali* (The Hungry Blackleg) and *Mutiyanaya Putran* (The Prodigal Son) are all popular on the stage. K. T. Muhammed's *Itu Bhoomiyanu* (This is Earth) and Cherukad's *Nammal Onnu* (We Are One) also treat of social questions. It has to be said that while problem plays conceived in a higher plane often fail with the audience, these musical plays which also discuss identical problems, succeed because of their music. In fact music is only a sugar-coating to the bitter pill of socio-political ideologies as preached by these plays.

Among the earlier musical plays on puranic themes mention has also to be made of *Tataka Vadham* and *Dhruvan* by the V. Krishnan Tampi, *Kabirdas* and *Pakkanar* by Vidwan Kelu Nair, and *Devayani Charitam* and *Balagopalan* by Mahakavi Kuttamath. In all of them songs are introduced with much greater imagination. In *Tataka Vadham* there is much genuine drama. Tataka is not an ogress as the Ramayana would have her, but a human being endowed with extremely human feelings and passions.

Another instance of exploiting puranic themes on the lines of the modern drama is *Mandodari* by Sardar K. M. Panicker. In *Amba* by Mahakavi Ulloor S. Parameswera Iyer, a voluminous work which cannot possibly be staged, the puranic heroes and heroines take on the symbolic form of lofty ideals.

Pulimana Parameswara Pillai wrote an 'expressionist' play, *Samatvavadi* (The Socialist) years ago. But, as it turned out, his has been the only experiment in the field.

Of late there has been a prolific output of one-act plays.

It was Appan Tampuran who showed the way with *Munnattu Viran*, and quite soon it inspired many votaries. G. Sankara Kurup wrote two allegorical pieces, *Iruttinu Munpu* (Before Darkness) featuring Fascist Italy's attack on Ethiopia and *Sandhya* (Eventide), a romantic piece involving natural phenomena like the sun and the dusk in an ethereal love affair. Many collections of one-act plays have now been brought out, notable among which are *Kamandalu* (containing five of them) by K. Ramakrishna Pillai, *Ekanka Mandalam* by Dr. K. M. George, *Appooppan* by Karoor Neelakanta Pillai, *Samagamam* by P. V. Krishnan Nair and *Tikkoteeyante Ekankangal* by Tikkoteeyan. *Arude Vijayam?* (Whose Success?) by Nagavallil R. S. Kurup is another fine piece. The writers who now contribute to the one-act play are far too numerous to be listed. However the names of Kesavadev, T. N. Gopinathan Nair and P. K. Veeraraghavan Nair have to be referred to specifically.

The radio play has come to stay as a popular dramatic form. The incentive broadcasting provides to the playwright as well as to the actor is considerable. In fact one is tempted to suppose that the Trivandrum and Kozhikode centres of Akashvani provide even greater impetus than the stage itself.

The number of plays turned out every year is staggering, but it has to be said that their general standard leaves much to be desired. There is no dearth of very good actors and actresses in Kerala, and every year there is an appreciable addition of fresh talent. Almost every village and town has its *Kala Samiti* (Dramatic Association) and annually the best of their productions are staged under the auspices of organizations like the Kendra Kala Samiti. In fact the stage is a most important cultural factor in Kerala today. But it has to surmount many difficulties, mostly technical, like modernising stage equipments and the building of theatres specifically designed for drama, before it can stand comparison with the stages of more advanced countries. There has also to be institutions for the training of talent. And there is the competition of the cinema too to reckon with.

CHAPTER XIV

RENAISSANCE IN POETRY

1. *The Venmani Movement*

At the time prose was taking on a new shape as a result of the contact with English literature, poetry too had begun to register certain changes and evince new tendencies. The single great influence on poetry until that time was Sanskrit literature: the *champus* were cast in the Sanskritic mould and the *attakkathas* were weighted with its vocabulary. It was even customary in the nineteenth century to appraise the status of a poet by the number of Kathakali works produced by him. Naturally, such an attitude served, though indirectly, to strengthen the hold of Sanskrit over Malayalam. The excellence of the works of Kunchan Nambyar was generally acknowledged, but the view persisted among scholars that they were not serious enough to be classed under the best literature. Their attitude is understandable, for Sanskrit learning was held a *sine qua non* for all poetic activity, and the Tullal works with their simple vocabulary and no flourishes were singularly free from its burden. It was in this context in the history of Malayalam poetry that some Nambutiri poets of Central Kerala initiated a new movement in poetry.

It was a movement oriented in favour of a chaste and simple idiom for poetry. Of course they could not dispense with Sanskrit entirely, but they could reduce its load to a great extent and project convincingly the charms of the native speech. They also took care to see that whenever a word was borrowed from Sanskrit, it was so simple and familiar that it blended harmoniously with Malayalam. The innovation that they thus effected was as far-reaching as that of Kunchan Nambyar, and soon enough the new style was hailed as the most delightful ever devised for poetry. The protagonists of the new movement were two of the ablest poets who ever composed in Malayalam, the Venmani Nambutiris, father and son.

Besides the appeal of the idiom, their poetry was also

characterized by a subtle undercurrent of humour. Venmanis were also pastmasters in compiling imageries. They knew which aspects of a theme would appeal to the reader most, and how to invest them with life. Therefore the images that they painted have an exquisite clarity and directness. They may be a little far-fetched, as in the following obeisance of the elder Venmani to Yasoda, but there is no ambiguity about the picture:

> I worship the hands of the blessed Yasoda
> which intermittently wipe away
> the sweat that buds on the moon-like face
> of the cloud-coloured child, while tired with play,
> and flute in hand, he gains her lap
> and drinks with zest from her ample breasts.

We said that the Venmani style was hailed as the most delightful ever devised for poetry, but their poems had to brave some bitter criticisms also. The reason is that they were so much obsessed with the erotic that their imagination often hovered about the obscene. At no time before had the sensual been treated with such robust vulgarity, and none else had ever revelled in so doing. But their contemporaries tolerated them for the reason that it was all couched in a light and cheerful style. At any rate they could not ignore the Venmanis, for they had in their productions an ideal poetic pattern worthy of emulation. They discovered in them the true diction of Malayalam poetry, and also the proportion and nature of Sanskrit words which should go into it. Besides, the new movement served as a corrective to the style set by the *attakkatha* overcharged as it was with the diction of Sanskrit.

Of the two Venmanis, it was the junior who contributed more to Malayalam poetry. His *Pooraprabandham* is a famous *kavya* in Malayalam. A long poem on the famous Pooram festival of the Vatakkunnatha Temple of Trichur, it is notorious for the treatment of the erotic, but its popularity is as much due to this notoreity as to the felicity of its style. It came at a time when the public were fed up with puranic tales retold in the highly Sanskritised idiom of Manipravala

and with the *attakkathas*. *Pooraprabandham* with its realistic portrayal of contemporary life and in a language not far different from that of the people, was a pleasant change, and so it found immediate favour with the public. It is this approximation of its language to the true genius of Malayalam and its realism which, more than its content of *sringara*, won for it unprecedented popularity. In fact there are many quatrains in the *kavya* which have no touch of the erotic and these *slokas* also have an equal appeal for the reader. For example, the pageants and the rituals connected with the Pooram, the crowds which mill to see and participate in the festivities and how and whence they came and the difficulties that the poet himself faces amidst all these excitements are described in vivid detail. In the following lines the poet provides a kaleidoscopic view of a section of the crowd:

> Rayas, and the Ayammas
> dressed in gaudy clothes,
> ears decked with studs and teeth
> filed and brought to shape,
> Tamils, Telugus, shepherd folk
> and Brahmin widows with shaven heads,
> Namburis who beautify
> their person in such diverse ways
> as to make Kama himself
> jealous of their handsomeness,
> and Nair men and lovely women
> throng in happy excitement.

Some of these specimens of humanity who fascinate the poet come in for closer scrutiny:

> Matted locks infused with ash
> dangling *rudraksha* rosaries,
> eyes brimming with ire, and clad
> in deer-skins and holding tongs
> and with mortal daggers armed,
> and leading on their pet monkeys
> Gosayi mendicants tramp about
> the Pooram scene with nonchalance.

Any number of pen-pictures can be culled from Sanskrit and Manipravala poetry, but it would be difficult to come across lines like the foregoing which excel with their realism. Pooram is a festival which any Malayali can see and participate in, and when a poet chooses to treat it realistically, yet poetically, it is bound to have a popular appeal. A theme can be treated in many ways—subjectively, objectively or fancifully. Each approach has its own merits and evokes in the reader different kinds of response. Some there are who fascinate us with gentle and tantalising portrayals, and some who overwhelm us with unvarnished accounts of their emotions and experiences. The latter are plain-spoken and even provocative, and when we are impressed by them, it is not always out of any genuine conviction. In fact one may refuse to endorse what he is told and may even protest against the poet, but all the same he would go with him all the way. The best instances of this provocative approach in Malayalam poetry are Kunchan Nambyar and, after him, the Venmanis. There is much punch in their words and much satire.

There are many memorable imageries in the younger Venmani. A distinguishing feature of his poetry is the lavish use of choice words which create the desired atmosphere. The quatrain, the substance of which is given below, is one such instance of using suggestive words:

> Bedecked with wreaths of glorious stars,
> in darkness softly apparelled,
> beams of smiles from the moon-face shedding,
> and dancing breasts of golden lotus buds,
> like to a woman, blissfully
> and promisingly, came the night.

The Venmani Movement attracted many leading poets of the day, and they all took to composing in the new style. It became in fact the basis of a school of poetry which flourished at the Kodungalloor Palace of Cochin, a famous centre of Sanskrit learning. The poets were all great scholars in Sanskrit, but it was the chaste and simple Malayalam idiom which appealed to them most. Pre-eminent among those who made for themselves a name in the new style are

Kodungalloor Kochunni Tampuran, Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Tampuran, Kathullil Achuta Menon, Naduvathu Achan Nambutiri and Sivolli Nambutiri.

2. *Kerala Varma and the Rhyme Controversy*

The style evolved by Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampuran —it is a grand style saturated with the vocabulary of Sanskrit and an excessive measure of rhyme—and manifested in his translation of *Sakuntalam* did not enlist many followers from even among those who admired it. On the other hand, both in the North and in the South, the Venmanis had a better following. Kerala Varma believed that his was the better style and persisted for some more time in the hope that he would one day be emulated. Meanwhile, the stirrings of a new awakening were felt in literary circles. The columns of periodicals, more especially the *Malayala Manorama*, were thrown open to poets, and this brought them together on a common platform. There was much enthusiasm for peotry, and much healthy competition too, but, as it turned out, their productions lacked in any enduring value. The reason is this: most, if not all, the poets who composed at that time hailed from aristocratic circles in society, and poetry, to them, was more a hobby than the expression of the verities of life. They loved ease, and as they had nothing much to do with the anxieties of life or the life which flowed around them, their productions tended to be shallow and divested of all empirical significance. They were clever, and they did surprise their readership with their great learning and jugglery with words, but there was nothing genuine about their poetry, any deeply felt emotion or any message. Their poems were mostly in the form of *otta slokas*, that is to say, 'single quatrains', and their themes, epistles from poet to poet, *samasyas* or poetic riddles, tests in word-power and ability to spin out figures of speech, exercises in fun and fantasy, and hymns, panegyrics and greetings.

The enthusiasm and the sense of humour which these poets displayed lapsed often into mutual recriminations. When, for instance, Kathullil Achuta Menon composed *Kavi Pushpavali* comparing contemporary poets to different

flowers, the younger Venmani was offenedd because his father was not ranked sufficiently high. *Kavi Bharatam* of Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Tampuran which also touched upon contemporary events and personalities created a still greater commotion and provided the grist for another controversy. One is no longer interested in these episodes, but they indicate a phase in poetic activity when the poets became conscious of the possibilities of their medium. Besides participating in these debates, they took time off to bring out some translations from Sanskrit and English and some original poems on themes of topical interest also. On the whole, there was much activity on the literary front during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

With the increasing output of poetry through journals and correspondingly, with the rapid rise of poets to literary fame, the tendency to criticise and evaluate the relative merits of their works also came into being. There was no scientific methodology in their evaluations, for their poetry itself was concerned more with the sound values of words and figures of speech than with any basic poetic values, but the critical attitude was itself a healthy development. The first topic which they discussed was *dwitiyakshara prasam*, that is, whether the second character of every foot in a quatrain should be identical so that there would be an unbroken rhyme-pattern for the verse. Someone wrote an article in the *Malayala Manorama* critising the obsession of contemporary poets with rhyme, and that ignited the controversy. The rhyme-lovers were scandalised and they came out with vehement replies. Soon the views of the leaders in the field were called for, and that worsened the situation. Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampuran, Kunjikkuttan Tampuran and Naduvathu Achan Nambutiri expressed themselves strongly in favour of it, and A. R. Raja Raja Varma, Punnasseri Nambi and Antappayi, against it. Nothing more was required to drive the poets of the day into opposite camps—and the battle lasted many years.

It has since been felt that the issue was not so vital as to call for that amount of heat and mutual recriminations, but to those poets who were driven into the thick of the fray, it was almost a question of their existence as poets. Therefore

they spared no pain in arguing out their points in great detail and bringing out convincing illustrations in support of their theories. The ultimate outcome of the controversy was that, in the process, the practice of sacrificing sense for sound was effectively questioned and Malayalam was enriched with a substantial volume of good poetry produced by the rival camps. The first major attempt was that of A. R. Raja Raja Varma: he brought out a translation of Kalidasa's *Megha Sandesam* without the 'second-letter-rhyme' and convinced his readers that rhyme is not indispensable to good poetry. It was now the turn of the champions of rhyme to prove to the contrary, and to this end they exerted themselves.

It often happens that the private lives of poets bear directly on their poetry and that works produced under the stress of personal feelings hold a far greater appeal than those produced imaginatively. A good instance from Malayalam literature is *Mayura Sandesam* (The Peacock Messenger) of Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampuran (1845-1915). We had occasion to refer to him in other contexts also, but primarily it is as the poet of this *sandesa kavya* that he made for himself an enduring name. It so happened that a Maharaja of Travancore was displeased with him, and he was forced to spend a few years of his life at Haripad, cut off from his wife who resided at Trivandrum. And his distress at the unkind separation took the form of a *sandesa kavya* in the Sanskritic tradition with a peacock to carry his message of love.

The one outstanding feature of *Mayura Sandesam* is that it is an excellent illustration of the grandeur of rhyme, especially of *dwitiyakshara prasam*. In addition, it speaks much for the imaginative capacities of the poet. But it has to be said that as a *kavya* which calls for a high degree of emotional intensity and a philosophy of life, it wants in poignancy. The dexterity displayed by the poet in the choice of words—he is careful more especially about their sound-values—and the massing of figures of speech is indeed marvellous, but the emotive content is too meagre to strike any sympathetic chord in the reader. The theme has everything in it for a generous measure of human warmth to be put in as it is personal, but instead, the poet offers hardly anything more than colourful descriptions of the route from Haripad to Trivandrum in a

language laden with an onomatopoeic vocabulary. Evidently, *Megha Sandesam* is the pattern he had before him, but the contrast between the two in respect of the emotive and lyrical values so essential to poetry of this type is only too glaring. An inordinate love of high-sounding words and imageries, and the Manipravala style which was his favourite, proved detrimental to the candour and the directness of the *kavya*. It would seem that *Mayura Sandesam* was a retrograde step at a time when the Venmani style was zealously acclaimed everywhere and was setting the tone for much of future poetry.

We can thus pick many holes in *Mayura Sandesam* but the fact remains that it is as much important to Malayalam poetry as any other poem written in the language. There is a certain grandeur about it, something of the solidity of classical poetry. And its diction, achieved by the clever blending of choice words, is ever fascinating. There are many *slokas* in the work, like the original of the one given below, which are not only melodious, but appealing to the emotions also.

> Dost thou recall, my blue-eyed love,
> that once while out in search of game
> amidst the groves, I killed a dove,
> and then seeing its grieving mate
> thou didst, in pity, implore me
> to send it too to the home of Death?

3. *Mahakavyas*

The controversy on rhyme showed no signs of abating with the years. On the other hand it raged more fiercely. Kerala Varma had in Mahakavi Ulloor an able lieutenant to defend the cause of rhyme and A. R. Raja Raja Varma—he was Kerala Varma's nephew—in K. C. Kesava Pillai, to fight back with equal vigour. In an outspoken address to the Malayala Samajam of the Maharaja's College, Trivandrum, Kesava Pillai challenged the champions of rhyme, and soon, the papers too stepped in to take sides, and that led to redoubled efforts on both sides to produce poetry—and this time, the major part of it was in the form of *mahakavyas* or epics after Sanskrit—to drive home their contentions more convincingly.

The composition of a *mahakavya* is no easy task, it calls for the highest faculties of the imagination. The themes usually are the lives and doings of great men or sagas of royal dynasties. There should be a minimum of seven *sargas* (cantos) and each *sarga* should be in a different metre. A major proportion of the *slokas* should be devoted to descriptions, the story element being but only the thread to string them together. According to Sanskrit poetics certain things must invariably be described in every *mahakavya*. For instance, we have the well-known prescription of Dandi that *nagara* (city), *arnava* (sea), *saila* (mountain), *rtu* (seasons) and *chandrarkodaya* (the rising of the moon and the sun) should be described in every epic. The *slokas* should be also ornamented with figures of speech.

The poets of Kerala who took to composing *mahakavyas* have all striven hard to meet these classical prescriptions. As the composition of a *mahakavya* was deemed the highest achievement in poetry, every eminent poet of the day exerted himself to produce at least one. The first work thus composed was *Ramachandravilasam* by Azhakathu Rama Kurup. And soon there was a flood of them, the best known being *Uma Keralam* of Ulloor, *Rukmangada Charitam* of Pantalam Kerala Varma, *Chitra Yogam* of Vallathol and *Kesaveeyam* of K. C. Kesava Pillai. It cannot be claimed that these works are in any way outstanding or that they have exerted any profound influence on the subsequent course of poetry. It can only be said that there are certain passages in every epic like the lament of Umayamma Rani (*Uma Keralam*) for her children drowned in a tank by her foes, the panegyrics on Kerala etc., which will endure as poetry, and that *Kesaveeyam* with its remarkable clarity differs from the rest in approximating more to the language of modern poetry. *Uma Keralam*, incidentally, is based on an episode from the history of Travancore, and differs, as such, from other *mahakavyas* which retell mostly puranic tales.

Pandavodayam and *Vancheesa Vamsam* of Kodungalloor Kochunni Tampuran and *Sri Yesu Vijayam*—the life of Chirst—of Kattakkayathil Cheriyan Mappila also belong to the same era. Of the later works mention may be made of *Raghavabhyudayam*, *Raghuvira Vijayam* and *Uthara Bharatam* of Vadakkumkoor and *Veda Viharam* of K. V. Simon. Most of the

mahakavyas in Sanskrit including *Raghuvamsam*, *Kumara Sambhavam*, *Magham*, *Naishadham*, *Kiratarjuneeyam* and *Angala Samrajyam* have also been translated into Malayalam.

The *mahakavya* is no longer a live force. Hardly any poet composes such long poems today. The craze is for the *khanda kavya* or the shorter epic. This modern poetic form had in fact made a beginning with *Deiva Yogam* of Kerala Varma. Incidentally, *Deiva Yogam* serves also to illustrate a radical change which came over this great champion of rhyme in respect of poetic ideologies. The *dwitiyakshara prasam* which he held as indispensable is completely eschewed in this work, which, he states, was composed at the request of his disciple and nephew A. R. Raja Raja Varma. The coming of the *khanda kavya* marks the beginning of the Romantic Movement in Malayalam literature.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

1. *Kavyas and Elegies*

The first stirrings of the Romantic Movement were felt as early as when the major poets were preccupied with composing *mahakavyas* after the classical manner. *Asanna Marana Chinta Satakam* (Hundred Thoughts of a Man about to Die) of K. C. Kesava Pillai, a *khanda kavya* laden with a generous measure of rhyme and alliteration, was the first work to strike a romantic note amidst the neo-classical productions of six decades ago. It portrays with some emotional fervour the thought-processes of the head of a family about to die—his reactions to the impending event as a husband, father and leader of the locality. He is resigned to the inescapable, but he casts, all the same, a longing, lingering look behind on all those things that he loved, and the world itself.

> Ah! my pillow, my bed, my couch
> that until this day yielded
> the highest joys under my touch,
> and also my fan that consoled me,
> no more would we meet again!

Some of the poems of Kundoor Narayana Menon and Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Tampuran also reveal a romantic imagination. The heroic was Kundoor's favourite *rasa*, and he found in history themes which suited his inclinations admirably. His was altogether a new approach, for most of the poets of the day drew their material from the puranas only. It would seem that he took his hint in respect of the tone of his poems from the ballads in English. The heroic is by no means the only *rasa*. There is the erotic also, and the two are happily blended as we have in *Vadakkan Pattu*. There is a certain measure of spontaneity about his verse in spite of his excessive love of rhyme. But he has not succeded in putting any drama into the episodes which, being heroic, not only

permit it, but also need it. Nevertheless his poems are enjoyable thanks to his able handling of the two major *rasas*.

Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan Tampuran also drew his themes from the historical and legendary lore of Kerala. His style marks a further step from the Venmanis insofar as he used an exclusively Malayalam vocabulary. The less the borrowings from Sanskrit the better it is for poetry was his ideal. But when it became an obsession with him, his poetry tended to become artificial. The one beneficent influence the new style had on others was that it contributed further to the weaning away of the lovers of Manipravala from their passion for Sanskrit. His more important poems which evidence this change in style, as also a strong romantic imagination are *Keralam*, *Kudalmanikkam* and *Palullicharitam*.

All these poets were bred in the classical tradition, and so in spite of their romantic aptitude, they could not get away from the classical forms of poetry. It was the next generation which effected a complete break with classicism and ushered in the Romantic Movement as we now understand the term.

They had in A. R. Raja Raja Varma, poet, scholar and grammarian, an able guide to show the way and fight the forces of blind formalism. In fact the rhyme controversy for which he, more than anybody else, was responsible was itself born of his romantic inclinations and contempt for the classical forms which became lifeless in the hands of their modern votaries. The doctrine that poets should concentrate more on the emotive and thought content than on formal values—a doctrine which he preached through his lieutenant K. C. Kesava Pillai—was in effect a challenge to the classicists who refused to budge an inch from the classical prescriptions. It is not that forms like the *mahakavya*, as poetic forms, are bound to be lifeless—in fact K. C. Kesava Pillai composed *Kesaveeyam* in a manner commensurate with the new ideologies —it simply means that an excessive passion for the externals of poetry like rhyme and alliterations and the use of figures of speech in place and out of place lays a heavy premium on the more cardinal values of poetry. Besides preaching the new ideals with missionary zeal, Raja Raja Varma composed both in Malayalam and in Sanskrit to exemplify the beauties

of the new poetry. The best-known among his works in a romantic vein is *Malaya Vilasam* (Glories of the Malaya Mountains), a hymn to the glories of the Sahya Ranges.

Malaya Vilasam is a romantic poem in the sense that the poet and his emotions play the more dominant role and that his reactions to the object count for more than the object itself. The poet is on his way back to Kerala after a trip to Madras, and as his train crosses the Western Ghats, he surveys the panorama of the sylvan setting. His sensibilities are immediately excited, and hardly able to contain himself in the presence of the grand and ineffably splendid manifestation of Nature, bursts forth in lyrical raptures. The mountains are a familiar theme in poetry, and one can cull any number of descriptions of them from the classical *kavyas*. But what most of the classical poets have done is to string out a few *slokas* describing some of its aspects like its height, its vastness, its flora and fauna, and decorate them with some far-fetched similies and metaphors. *Malaya Vilasam* also contains such descriptions, but what strikes the reader most in it is the all-pervading emotional fervour of the poet. One gets a feel of the grandeur, the mystery and the invincibility of the mountains, and when the poet visualises them as the bastion of Kerala, his thoughts go forth to the land and its people. The thought that foreigners are here in spite of them distresses the poet, and the reader shares with him some noble patriotic sentiments.

The younger poets who had the benefit of English education were irresistibly drawn to the new movement. They took a particular liking for the elegy and, inspired evidently by Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, brought out some fine specimens of romantic poetry. The earliest poems in an elegiac vein are *Priya Vilapam* (Lament for a Friend) of M. Raja Raja Varma and *Oru Vilapam* (A Lament) of C. S. Subramonian Potti (1903).

The elegy, as a poetic form, was practically unknown to Malayalam. Barring the elegiac passages in *kavyas* and the memorial quatrains composed on the deaths of well-known poets and personages, there was hardly any poem which can be called an elegy. Even the incidental passages in longer poems and the quatrains were more in the form of wailings

than elegies with a basic thought-pattern. The English elegies now provided the younger poets a model for the development of a similar branch of poetry in Malayalam. And out of this influence were born *Priya Vilapam* and *Oru Vilapam*.

The first poem bemoans the death of the poet's friend, Prince Aswati Tirunal. Besides the identity of themes, it bears a close affinity to *In Memoriam* in respect of its thought content also. The sorrow on the passing away of a near and dear one is genuine, and the poet gives himself up to some philosophic meditations also. To Subramonian Potti it was the death of his child that provided the great urge to compose the elegy. Naturally his emotions are far more intense and sincere, and his thought-process, original and spontaneous. The inconsolable grief of a father on the death of his child finds full expression in the poem. And not a suggestion is left that its design was dictated by any exotic model. It has to be noted that these elegies were composed at a time when the poets of the day looked upon their medium as hardly anything more than a vehicle for the expression of their skills at versification, and the readers, as an aristocratic pastime. They indicate a radical change in such an attitude to poetry, and initiate a move in favour of putting it for the expression of spontaneous urges and deeply felt emotions.

But these elegies did not inspire any immediate following. As a matter of fact, they went unnoticed for a long time in poetic circles. The majority of the poets were still wedded to classical traditions and were too much taken up with arguing out their points of view in the controversies on rhyme to pay any heed. *Khanda kavyas* were not suspended, for literary magazines like *Rasika Ranjini*, *Bhasha Poshini*, *Lakshmi Bai*, *Mangalodayam* and *Vivekodayam* were in need of shorter poems and were willing to permit space to the younger poets also. And when Pantalam Kerala Varma, a premier poet of the day, started *Kavana Koumudi*, a magazine devoted exclusively to poetry (it was a weekly to begin with), the poets, old and young, found in it enough room for the fullest expression of their ideals in respect of poetry. It was this magazine which served as a training ground for most of the poets who were to make a name in literature in the years to come.

2. *V. C. Balakrishna Panicker*

Of all the names which became well-known through *Kavana Koumudi*, the most important was V. C. Balakrishna Panicker. Apart from the intrinsic merit of his poems, which is considerable, they have the added significance of being the first productions from which much of later romantic poetry took its tone. When his *Oru Vilapam* (A Lament) appeared in 1909, it was not only a fine piece of elegiac poetry that his fellow-writers and the public saw in it, but an indication of the course of future poetry also. The poet was only nineteen at that time, and naturally, it is not without signs of immaturity. But with all that, it is a poem with a big difference. The theme is highly romantic. In the dead of a weird night, when death hovers about the land in the form of cholera, the young wife of the mourner dies, leaving him utterly helpless and in a fit of uncontrollable grief. It is not known if the poet himself is the bereaved husband, at any rate that is the impression one gets reading the poem. At no time before had so much passion been put into the poetic medium, and seldom so much concern for human destiny.

> The time is when, smitten with cholera,
> the people of the land are withering:
> And she too is gone, is gone for ever—
> the sharer of his life.
> The pitch-black night is full with rain,
> an unearthly terror grips all life;
> the lamp burns low with untrimmed wick
> and against it sits a man brooding.

So begins the elegy. The next few stanzas emphasize the desolation and the terror which grip Nature:

> Like to a minstrel singing his lays
> at the portals of Nature, so terrible,
> the owl is mopping, the eerie death-fowl
> is crowing to the sound of its flapping wings;
> and caught in the whirlpool of love and fright,
> benumbing grief and hallucinations—

he feels it not—it's well that way—
his pulse stops beating, his blood coursing.

He is petrified, and it takes him a little time to regain the faculties of his senses. Now sighs pour forth from him as from bellows, tears flow unceasingly and his eyes glow like red-hot charcoal. And when the magnitude of his loss dawns on him,

Hugging and caressing fitfully
the body of his beloved
which in loveliness far excels
the golden *chempak's* lovely blooms,

he gives tongue to his uncontrollable grief in a language punctuated by frequent sighs. With her head on his lap, and lifeless and lovely, she lies in that hut like a shattered dream—and what indeed could the young man do save sing her requiem?

He recalls the glories of her life, her purity and her excellences, and unable to understand why she should die, sinks for a while in *vedanta* and metaphysics. But all his meditations on the mysteries of life and the Universe and his realisation that the human body, composed as it is with flesh and fat, is an impermanent manifestation of a higher force which wills the Universe and sets it in motion and that death is but only the releasing of that flesh-bound Principle to its source, do not serve to lighten the burden of his agony. The blow is so stunning that 'the light of *vedanta* which should illumine the eye' is shut off by 'the eye-salve of the pangs of separation'. The lot of the survivor is indeed lamentable, and why not, asks he to himself, put an end to all this agony?

I knock at the door of the god of death,
my being ruthlessly broken and halved,
but caught in the meshes of life's longings
I am drawn to living in unceasing woe.

But what has happened has happened for all time, and nothing, neither the chirping of birds on the morrow, nor the caresses of the rosy rays of the dawn, could disturb her slumber ever

so slightly. Those eye-lids are sealed by fate, and never more will they open to hold him in her love.

This, in broad outline, is the theme of the elegy. A rare intensity of feeling and a penetrating insight into human destiny entitle *Oru Vilapam* to be ranked among the very best elegies composed in Malayalam.

The most remarkable thing about it, however, is that the poet had not seen twenty summers at the time of its composition.

Viswa Rupam (A Vision of the Universe) is the next major contribution that Panicker made to romantic poetry. As an artist painting with words and a visionary who sees through the veil of the Universe, the mastery and the maturity he displays in this poem, composed four years after the elegy, are something remarkable. The theme is empirical: he stands on the seashore at eventide, is thrilled by the vision of the Universe, spends the night in the company of the waves, the stars and the moon, and wakes up from his reveries with the break of day. There are any number of descriptions in Malayalam poetry on such popular subjects as the sunset, the sunrise and the like, but none like *Viswa Rupam*, which springs forth so spontaneously from the contemplation of the immensity, the splendour and the mystery of the macrocosm. The classicists stand aloof and paint the landscapes in a formalist style, and often after the familiar productions of the old masters which endless plagiarism had rendered stale, but Panicker is too radical a romantic to copy them nor even to conform to the prescriptions of tradition. His heart goes forth to the ends of the horizon, revels in the glories of Nature, feels in it all the pulse of a supreme Principle and broods over the ways of its operation. To begin with, he is dazed by the flaming colours and the breath-taking forms which blaze across the horizon as the sun sinks slowly over the western waves. He knows not how to paint them, so fleeting is the vision and so inadequate are words. But he must do it all the same, and surprisingly the words in his palette take on the desired tints. The poem begins with a series of gorgeous imageries:

> Is it that the Smith of the Universe
> is smelting the golden orb of the sun

and plunging it in the waves to fashion
a necklace of stars for the charmer, Night?

The brilliance of colour soon fades into the limitless blue of the firmament, and from that blue glitter the radiant stars which no imagery can portray in their primeval splendour:

Or the gems of the choice of the Almighty
picked by Him from the cosmic treasure-bag—
infinite, eternal, invaluable—
and bespangled on the firmament's blue?

The being of the poet is thrilled by lyrical raptures as his imagination soars freely into the vaults of heaven. But unable to fathom the significance of all that glory, he cries out in happy helplessness:

Where the vagrant human intellect
before the testament of His hand's might!

It is so imbecile, this intellect of man, and all his metaphysical questionings are of no avail:

Nothing is possible of cognition;
nothing of knowledge is empirical;
empirical knowledge is perforce false;
nothing is true—that is philosophy!

Panicker was a meteor in the poetic firmament of Kerala. A meteor, because he dazzled the public with an unusual effulgence for a little while—and died at the age of twenty-seven.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ROMANTIC POETRY: ASAN

1. *A Fallen Flower and a Pair of Heroines*

The golden age of the Romantic Movement envisaged and initiated by A. R. Raja Raja Varma was the age of the grand trinity of modern poetry: Kumaran Asan, Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer and Vallathol Narayana Menon. They were all bred in the classical tradition, and were classicists to begin with, but it did not take them long to realise that their future, as indeed the future of Malayalam poetry, lay with the Romantic Movement. It was thus given to them to produce the flower of modern poetry and commemorate their age as one of the most important in the annals of Malayalam literature. The volume and variety of their output—*khanda kavyas*, lyrics, odes, sonnets—were phenomenal, and their influence on the younger generation, far-reaching.

Kumaran Asan, the first of the trinity, differs from the other poets of the day in that while his colleagues in the field were taken up with the *mahakavya* he showed no interest in it, and that the best part of his youth was over when he took to poetry as a serious vocation.

The circumstances of his early life were such that the late beginning was inevitable. He was away at Bangalore and Calcutta for higher studies in Sanskrit, and as such could not be associated with or influenced by the literary activities of Kerala. Moreover, as a young man, he was more inclined to questions of the spirit than to the *rasas* of poetics, influenced as he was by Sri Narayana Guru, the pre-eminent spiritual leader of the Eazhava community, whose disciple he had become. Attempts had already begun under the guidance of the Guru for the social redemption of this community, and Asan who was a close associate was called upon to be one of the early workers of the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S. N. D. P. Yogam), an organisation for the removal of the socio-political disabilities of the community.

During his student days Asan had composed some poems

in an erotic vein, but under the influence of the Guru he turned to the composition of devotional hymns and lyrics. But his temperament was such that devotional poems could not express him fully. The new poetic ideals held out by A. R. Raja Raja Varma and his *chelas* attracted him, and he was strengthened in his belief in the new movement by his reading of English poetry, of Tennyson, Shelley and Keats, which he could, thanks to his knowledge of English, gain during his sojourn at Bangalore and Calcutta. His stay at Calcutta proved a particularly beneficent influence, for here he could come into close contact with the under-currents of the Bengali Renaissance, with the spiritual awakening brought about by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and the literary tendencies initiated and developed by Bankim Chandra, Madhusoodan Dutt and Rabindranath Tagore.

These influences led him, naturally, to nurturing dreams of enriching the cultural life of his own native land, and when the occasion offered itself, he translated them into action—as a social reformer working with the S. N. D. P. Yogam, as a journalist, and as the apostle of a new school of poetry. *Vivekodayam*, a journal which he edited, served him a two-fold purpose—as a vehicle for publishing the ideologies of his organization and for his self-expression as a poet. The first major poem to appear in its columns, a poem which has since been looked upon as a landmark in Malayalam Literature, is *Vina Poovu* (A Fallen Flower), an elegy upon a dead flower. The Romantic Movement had already begun, but nothing comparable to it in depth of pathos, profundity of thought and warmth of imageries was composed until that time (1909). The theme is quite simple—the sad fate of a flower fallen from its glory. But we have in it a vision, as it were, of the splendour and tragedy of human life.

A bud is born of a vine, and bathing in the ripples of moon-lit nights and dancing with the rays of the morning sun, it blossoms into youth. An ethereal glow lits up her cheeks and a tantalising smile flits across her lips. Her glamour holds the butterfly hosts in thrall, but her heart goes forth to a kingly bee who came from afar serenading to her. To him, most happily, she offers the cup of her charms, and that is why, now that she is gone, he is hovering over her

remains, and wailing loud, knocks his head against the trees and rocks on his way. Maybe, he is frustrated in his quest for a love which, he hoped, would last unto eternity, or maybe he is repenting of his misdeeds in going in for other flowers while she waited there for him—she who had spurned the butterflies and offered him her all. Indeed, if the latter were the case, he merits this agony, for it is a retribution for insincerity. The lover now soars heavenward, driven as if by a firm purpose: does he seek to intercept the spirit of his beloved, following the trail of her fragrance?

The pitiless hands of Death have fallen on her, and there she lies, sunk to dust, lamented by all created things. The spider weaves for her a soft silken shroud, the dawn decks her with a chaplet of pearly dew-drops, the stars rain dewy tears, the sparrows sing her requiem, the sun lingers over the Western hills, pale and sorrowing, and the wind sighs disconsolately. The Universe itself is pregnant with an unearthly grief at the great tragedy. For she was a paragon of everything good and true and beautiful, and who indeed could help bewailing her sad demise?

The poet is now obsessed with the big question: why should one so richly endowed be cut away in the prime of life's glories? Any number of explanations is possible, but the truth would seem to be that none could fathom the mystery of Creation. Maybe, when once the mission of life is fulfilled, it is unimportant when its temporal existence ceases to be. See the lightining: It is transient, but it is the purest of all light. Is not such an existence nobler far than the everlasting rocks which do nothing but hurt the feet of unwary travellers? True, it is sad to think that she is no more, but it is no use grieving, it is an inexorable law of Nature. All created things must one day cease to be, though that is not their ultimate end, either. That which ceases to be here will blossom elsewhere and fulfil its pre-ordained mission in diverse ways. Who knows if this very flower will not reappear on the bough of the *kalpaka* tree? Who knows if it will not fulfil its mission in its next birth beautifying the tresses of a celestial nymph? Or as a *puja* flower for the sempiternal sages? Thus we may derive consolation—though, as living ones, it is impossible not to feel sorry.

Soon these remains would wither and merge in the elements. This is the way of all living things, tears are of no avail, life after all is but a dream.

This, in brief, is the theme of *Vina Poovu*. It struck an altogether refreshing note, for never before was such a poem with so much thought and poetry going hand in hand composed in Malayalam. The forty and odd stanzas are rooted in one central idea and they constitute an organic whole. The plan of the poem, as also its elegiac tone, reminds one of Western models, of the poems of Shelly and Keats especially, but its thought content is essentially Indian and *vedantic*.

The *slokas* which describe the childhood of the flower breathe a loving tenderness, and those portraying its youth, a soft voluptuousness:

> And growing thus thy features showed
> charms exquisite;
> thy countenance did slowly change,
> thy cheeks were lit
> O Flower, with a new-born light,
> a new-born smile through them did flit.
> Be he one on the *vedic* path
> of desires free,
> be he a coward before his foes
> confused doth flee,
> anyone who had eyes to see
> might have paused smitten with your charms.

It would seem that the thought content of *Vina Poovu*, a happy combination of *vedantic* philosophy and romantic imagination which betrays Western influences, was evolved by Asan during his sojourn outside Kerala, in Bengal particularly. At any rate, it established clearly that the poetry of Asan had opened out a new vista quite different from that of the ordinary and extraordinary poets of that time.

A little later he confirmed by his *khanda kavyas*, *Nalini* (1911) and *Lila* (1914) that the path he had chosen had nothing in common with the classical traditions of the day. Themes from non-puranic sources, and of the poet's own devising, were not unknown in Malayalam poetry, but what the earlier

poets had attempted in such *kavyas* was nothing more than to tell a story in verse. *Nalini* and *Lila* were entirely different —in the organization of plot, narrative style and denouement. The poet seems to have taken some hints from Western models in the composition of these two poems: the chronological sequence of events, and the events themselves, are subordinated to the dramatic unity and the piognancy of the whole. Thus in *Nalini*, for example, we are shown only the very last meeting between the lovers, Nalini and Divakaran, but their whole past flashes across our vision through the incidental references in their conversation. They are, as children, very much in each other's company, they attend the same school, and as they grow up, her regard for him matures into an all-absorbing love. But unaware of the workings of her heart, the youth dons the yellow robe and leaves for none knows where, and she, frustrated in her hopes and unwilling to become partner in a wedlock arranged by her parents, seeks to end her life in the depths of a Himalayan lake. But she is saved providentially by a woman ascetic who had her hermitage nearby, and comforted by her and made an inmate of her abode, she spends her days in the hope of meeting her lover some day. And it is with this long-awaited meeting that the *kavya* opens. The action of the poem takes but a few brief moments: she realises in his presence and by his words that there is a love that is not ego-bound, and in the wake of that mystic experience, she breathes her last in his ascetic arms.

Lila also opens with a similar dramatic situation. The heroine, long separated from her lover, takes to wandering over the wide world in search of him, and arriving at last in the forest of the Vindhyas, learns from her *sakhi*, her confidanté, that he lives somewhere nearby. There is suspense in such an opening, and the reader is drawn to hearing more of the fortunes of the lovers. Lila and Madanan were playmates in their childhood and lovers in their youth. But their love could not find fulfilment in wedlock, for her father gives Lila away in marriage to a rich merchant. Cut off from the moorings of his life, Madanan drifts away from the world of men, and almost mad, wanders the wilds chanting the name of his beloved. There is much tragedy in the life of

Lila too: her husband dies a premature death, and returning to the home of her parents finds that her father too had passed away and that her mother had immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre. She must now regain Madanan, a dream that she had nurtured all along, and that is how the search begins and her friend discovers him in the Vindhya Range. The rest of the action is quickly accomplished: the lovers meet for a brief moment and they cool their unquenched passions in the depths of a roaring cataract. *Nalini* and *Lila* differ primarily in this, that in the first the lovers stand on an almost divine plane, and in the second, are driven by tempestuous passions.

2. *Philosophic Content of Asan's Poetry*

A salient feature of Asan's poetry which marks it out from much of the contemporary productions is its rich philosophic content. It would seem as though that there is nothing incongruous between a romantic imagination and *vedantic* verities, so happily do they mingle in him. His views of life and the Universe are founded on Indian philosophy, on the *Upanishads* in particular. But unlike many other poets who have expatiated upon philosophic concepts, without caring for whether their expositions relate to the theme or not, Asan admitted into his poems only such principles as are strictly relevant and have a universal bearing. In *Vina Poovu*, *Nalini* and *Lila* we find him expound the illusory nature of temporal existence, and also the glory of love in its different manifestations. His surmises bear a certain affinity to *upanishadic* concepts in respect of these subjects, but he does not parade any of it without proper dressing. He compounds his philosophy with his abundant imagination in such happy proportions that one does not feel the burden of the thought content, and the poetry takes on an enduring freshness. For instance, when he tells the fallen flower:

> Like to a star that slowly sets
> in the Western Sea,
> and rises o'er the Eastern Mount
> in bright jubilee

Flower! thou may'st on Meru great
bloom on the *kalpaka* branch again—

he is voicing the *upanishadic* truth of rebirth and the immortality of the soul, but there is this difference, that it is not a mere paraphrase of the *Upanishads*, but poetry with the stamp of originality.

Almost all the later works of Asan are pitched in the same high philosophic key and propound the verities of temporal and spiritual existence. *Prarodanam* (A Lament), *Chintavishtayaya Sita* (The Meditations of Sita), *Chandala Bhikshuki* (Chandala Nun of the Buddhist Order) and *Karuna* (Compassion) are thus as much philosophical as romantic. *Prarodanam* is an elegy on the death of A. R. Raja Raja Varma, the poet's literary preceptor. The emotion that inspired it is the grief on the death of a revered person, but its cumulative effect is that of a philosophic poem. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* has no doubt served him as a model, but Asan's philosophy is essentially Indian. The mysteries of life and death and the nature of the relationship between the two are brought out in superb poetic diction.

Chintavishtayaya Sita (1919) is a long monologue—a stream of consciousness, so to say—of Sita, that paragon of womanhood. Victim of unmerited woes, she is now in the hermitage of Valmiki, reconciled to her banishment and the ascetic way of living. But when the sage takes her sons away to the court of Rama to participate in the *aswamedha yaga*, she cannot help recalling her eventful past with its joys and sorrows, its sorrows especially. She sits all alone in a sequestered corner of the hermitage park where a *vaka* tree spreads for her a canopy overhead, and then, as the dusk closes in, unsought for and unpremeditated, the memories of her past, tinged with the pent-up emotions of a wronged wife, flow forth quietly and irresistibly. It is a beautiful piece of poetry, pregnant with sorrow and a chastening philosophy. Asan identifies himself fully with his character, and as he conjures up the vast panorama of the Ramayana, it would seem as though that he had personally seen that great drama. The strength of this *khanda kavya* lies in his infinite sympathy for Sita, and his genuine sincerity. She, in Asan's view, is as

much a human being as any other, and he portrays her thought-process as a psychologist would the mind's currents and cross-currents which obsess his subject. If there is an element of bitterness in her account of the treatment she had had at her husband's hands, it is excusable, for it is natural. Those idealised notions of love and submissiveness attributed to women are not to be expected in all their virgin charms in one who had had to face the worst of life's miseries, and possessed, besides, an individualistic sense of justice. She had demonstrated with her life the splendour of chastity and had proved to the wide world that she was pure as driven snow. Yet Rama deserted her in a desolate wilderness. Obviously she cannot help being critical of his conduct, however submissive and loving she be. But when the first flush of her righteous indignation is over, she revalues his conduct with more than deserving magnanimity:

> Grievous indeed is the course of justice,
> the kings, alas! are other men's slaves!

After discussing the paradoxes inherent in kingship, she extols unreservedly the ideals which her lord symbolises:

> The concept of justice may well vary—
> so wide is the World, and infinite, Time:
> yet unparalleled ideal indeed art thou
> o king! for loving self-sacrifice.

She is now all remorse for the bitter thoughts which had filled her earlier in her cogitations:

> Forgive, oh lord, most mercifully,
> thy spouse who holds to her dignity
> for so today in a frenzied state
> detecting streaks of blemish in thee.

Gradually she sinks into a subconscious state, and the stream of consciousness still flowing, arrives at the point of bidding farewell to the 'lord of heavens' who rules 'the empire of the day', to the moon 'bathed in the whiteness of light',

to the starry hosts, to the dear dusk, to the lovely wilds and to Mother Earth, and finally when her inmost being murmurs:

> Salutations, dear Raghava!
> I'm from the boughs of thine arms rising;
> without support would I heavenward soar,
> rid of the shackles of trepidation—

the reader gets the feeling of rising with her into the pure infinite where there is no night nor day.

Through the few moments of Sita's thoughts Asan takes us to the cardinal issues and the great moments of the Ramayana, and over the panorama of life in all its glory and tragedy. There are many situations which, besides calling for a tear, compel the reader to ponder over the profounder issues of life.

3. *Champion of the Underdog*

Then came a major shift in the function Asan set for poetry: he related it to the life of society and its problems, the caste system in particular. The change was a natural consequence of the poet's close association with the movement to redeem the Eazhavas, a backward community, from its state of social degradation. There was in him an inborn tendency to fight the injustices perpetrated in the name of caste, and when he was drawn to fight for the socio-political advancement of the community which gave him birth, his poetry took on the uncompromising fervour of one who felt strongly against those injustices. Thus his later poems sound a challenge to the social order of the day. The tendency was there since early in his poetic career, when, in 1908, he composed *Oru Teeyakkuttiyute Vicharam* (The Thoughts of a Teeya Child), but it was not until the publication of *Simhanadam* (The Lion's Roar) in 1919 that it manifested itself as a major theme of his poetry. In lines such as

> Arise, arise, my brothers all,
> who with spiritual strength and love
> are irchly blessed: speed up where

the caste-demon rears its ugly face!
Sound the drums of battle and charge
the foe wherever be its stand—

we find him inspire his companions in their onslaught upon caste. And addressing the god of freedom he often prays

Cut off the chains from my feet, oh Lord,
and break the manacles off my hands!

But it took him another four years to embody his feelings in relation to the caste system in a major *kavya*. In 1923 appeared *Duravastha* (A Tragic State) on such a theme, and the commotion it created in the literary and social circles was indeed unprecedented. The theme is a bold and unorthodox one: a virgin of the Nambutiri (Kerala Brahmin) community becomes the spouse of a Pulaya (Harijan). The story might seem incredible when viewed against the social background of those days, but the way it is built up is perfectly convincing. It is against the backcloth of the tragic Moplah Revolt of Malabar (1921)—an upheaval which threw the whole social order of the country out of gear—that the action of the poem is set, and it is a fact of history that nothing was impossible in those chaotic days. Savitri, the Nambutiri maiden, is caught in the tempest of the rebellion, and rendered homeless and helpless by the sack of her *illom* and the massacre of her people, she is driven to take refuge in the hut of the 'untouchable' Chathan. She now realises that her moorings in tradition are snapped for ever and that she would have to begin her life anew, which she does with remarkable equanimity. The love and care which Chathan bestows upon her in her hour of trial comfort her, and her infinite gratitude culminates in her accepting him as her husband. No doubt, it was the tragic circumstances of her life that threw her into the arms of the Harijan youth, but the love which swelled in her bosom, in spite of herself, was spontaneous and true. It is like an expert psychologist that the poet traces the workings of her heart, and we accept that she loved him with all her being in spite of the very wide gulf that separates her caste from his. That love, when it is true, can bridge

the apparently unbridgeable is a favourite theme with Asan.

It is evident that the choice of such a story was prompted by the loftiest motives. What he sought to drive home to society was the utter foolishness of caste prejudices and malpractices like untouchability, and the magnitude of the loss in human material which Kerala, in common with the rest of India, was facing continually on this score. He argues out with much pathos and conviction that the human heart, in its unsullied state, does not approve of distinctions such as Brahmin and Harijan, and thus the divisions which it is forced to accept are the deliberate creations of unenlightened circumstances:

> The same indeed the Hand that cast
> the Brahmin and the Harijan;
> and what a range of glorious deeds
> of valour, love and intellect,
> hast thou thwarted from fruition
> o Hindu faith, because of Caste!
> And how many the finest men—
> the Sankaras, the Perumals—
> and bards—the Tunchans and Kunchans—
> who, in thy womb, aborted lie,
> alas, my Mother Kerala,
> because of Caste's bloodthirsty ways!
> And there do lie, Mother Bharat,
> six to seven crores gems in thee,
> which, burnished, would priceless be,
> and lustrous—but now cast away!

Such prayers, arguments, exhortations and indictments inspired and sustained all those who stood for social reform, and though the more orthodox in society frowned upon him, the nobility of his motives and the justice of his cause were destined to win in the long run.

Chandala Bhikshuki also is conceived in more or less the same tone though the theme is from Buddhist lore. The story takes place two-and-a-half millenniums ago when the Buddha himself was preaching the gospel in the dominions of King

Bimbisara. A *Chandala* (Pariah) maiden, Matangi by name, is fascinated by the conduct of Ananda, a disciple of the Buddha, who accepts a drink of water from her hands,and spiritually infatuated, she becomes a nun of the Buddhist order. The king could not possibly view the entry of a low-caste maiden in the *sangha* with favour, for it questioned the concept of caste and offended a section of his subjects. But he is convinced by the Blessed One that caste has no sanction either in religion or in codes of social morality.

Asan's next important work, which happened to be his last also, was *Karuna*. Perhaps, of all his works, this is the most popular; and undoubtedly, it is among the very best poems in Malayalam. There is no social criticism in it, nor much concern with *upanishadic* philosophy; it is pitched more or less in the same key as *Nalini* and *Lila*. This going back to earlier themes is revealing, for it indicates that Asan's concern with social evils was only a passing phase, notwithstanding it being a productive one in his career, and that his heart lay with themes which called for the exposition of the profounder aspects of life. It becomes evident when his output is viewed as a whole that he has focused his thoughts more on the perennial values of life than on ephemeral ones which fluctuate. In *Duravasta* and *Chandala Bhikshuki* he has meditated at some length on human destiny, only that such passages are secondary in significance to the more apparent—and topical—social criticism. In *Karuna* he discusses, as in the earlier poems like *Vina Poovu*, *Nalini*, *Lila* and *Chintavishtayaya Sita*, the broader and the deeper issues of human existence.

The story of *Karuna* is also taken from Buddhist lore. Vasavadatta, a courtesan of Mathura, is attracted irresistibly by the handsome Buddhist monk Upagupta, and to him she sends her confidanté with her message of love, which in reality was lust, inviting him to her mansion. But he disappoints her, for on all the three occasions he was invited, he sends back the same reply: "It is not yet time." Eventually she becomes the mistress of the leader of a guild, and ere long, of another man, a rich merchant, and finding it risky to serve two masters at the same time, she brings about the death of her first lover. Her crime is discovered, and arms

and legs and nose cut off by the servants of justice, she is left to die a miserable death in an eerie burning ghat. To Upagupta, it was the most opportune moment and meeting her in that dismembered state, offers her the peace that is vouchsafed in the Buddhist way. She is consoled, and she breathes her last in the arms of the ascetic. And he sheds for her a tear which, according to the poet, rose from the depths of *karuna*, compassion.

The beauty of this story is that it is told with remarkable artistry. The tone of the poem is such that the reader is kept spell-bound from beginning to end. The drama of the situations, the wide range of emotions, the intensity of passions and the music of the verse are indeed worthy of the finest poetry. The voluptuousness of Vasavadatta as she reclines on a couch in her bejewelled mansion in Mathura and the tragedy which hovers over her in her mutilated state, the weird burning ghat where are scattered the flower-like limbs of her body, the appearance of Upagupta on the scene and the many emotions which overcome her as she sees him, his exhortations which allay her passions and lead her to the portals of *nirvana*, the cremation of her remains, and that one tear-drop which, rising from the depths of compassion, cools her ashes—it symbolises that *weltanschauung* which set the Blessed One on his quest for the Solution—and his calm exit form the scene: all these make such an impression on the mind of reader that to escape from its haunting enchantment is not an easy possibility. Asan has fashioned out of a fragmentary Jataka episode a poem of remarkable power and beauty.

The poem, as a whole, is intensely emotional, but it is interespersed with many aphoristic passages which call for calm meditation. A characteristic feature of Asan's poetry is that emotions are always balanced with profound observations on human destiny. *Karuna* is a good instance, the following lines which refer to the dismembered state of Vasavadatta being typical of his method:

> A shudder it sends to contemplate
> these flower-like limbs strewn about
> in dust: alas, who did the deed?

Still they shine, these rarest gems
which no one has appraised as yet
anywhere in the realm of love.
The same is she, the Vasavadatta
whom we saw one eventide
adorn a flower-filled courtyard,
temptress of the Universe.
Pleasures, alas! are illusions:
Who indeed could ever predict
when and how the fickle scales
of Fate's balance would rise and fall?

In the foregoing account, we have referred only to some of Asan's major poems. It would be difficult to touch upon all his other works, they are so many and various. However, reference has to be made of *Sri Buddha Charitam*, another major work, and to the considerable body of lyrics. Moreover there are some plays, but most of them are translations. *Sri Buddha Charitam* also was begun as a translation—of Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*—but it is as good as an orginal in view of the spontaneity and individuality of the verse. Asan's lyrics constitute a separate and unique branch of poetry. There have been many poets in Kerala who were richly lyrical, but it was Asan who perfected the lyric, after Western models, as a poetic form in Malayalam.

When the heart is agitated and is full, it seeks relief either in opening its floodgates to others or in crying. In Asan's words:

A little relief do tears bring
a mind crowded with agonies.

That is the psychological process which gives rise to the lyric. But it does not mean that a lyric need always be a lament or a complaint. It can be the expression of any emotional state brought about by extraneous influences. Asan has composed a very wide category of them, all inspired by his own experience of life. In fact, he expresses himself nowhere better than in these short poems which rose spontaneously from his heart's deep core.

The collections *Pushpavadi* (Flower Garden), which the poet himself published (1922), and *Vanamala* (Garland of Wild Flowers) and *Manimala* (Garland of Pearls) published posthumously, contain the quintessence of his shorter poems. A proper understanding of these pieces is necessary for tracing Asan's development as a poet. In an early poem, *Kalakanta Gitam* (Song of the Koel) we get an insight into the texture of his mind: he was inclined to becoming an ascetic, but could not, due to adverse circumstances. An allegory addressed to "the koel of his mind", it is an expression of his conviction that nothing save Siva is permanent and that solace and freedom from doubts could be derived from this principle. In *Teeyakkuttiyude Vicharam* already referred to, we find his young imagination haunted by the spectre of social degradation. *Dushitamaya Nyayasanam* (A Corrupt Seat of Justice) has for its theme the conduct of a judge who was not just, swayed as he was with caste prejudices in a case which involved communal questions. The lovely little ode *Nishkapadatayodu* (Ode to Innocence) has a similar background. A friend of the poet, a man in whom he believed implicitly, turned faithless, and the poet who is greatly hurt finds solace in extolling sincerity.

This human virtue is personified as a beautiful celestial being who laments the cruelties inflicted on her by an insincere world. He consoles her in her sorrow, and so doing, himself draws comfort. Asan was a staunch believer in a Supreme Being. In fact, his earliest poems were devotional hymns addressed to his favourite deities. The devotional fervour evinced since early in life takes a profounder *vedantic* turn in later years, but there is no fundamental change in any of his beliefs. A popular epithet used in describing him is 'Bard of Love', for Love, in the broader sense of the term, is the basic feeling which animates all his poems. In poems such as *Nalini* and *Chandala Bhikshuki* we have some of the finest tributes ever paid to love by Malayali poets. That he always felt the surge of this chastening and universal sentiment in his inmost being is fully borne out by the many elegies he wrote on the death of his friends and relations. The grief that suffuses them has the ring of the porfoundest sincerity, and they bear the imprint of his struggles with sorrow. *Prarodanam*

is one such elegy, though as it turned out, its cumulative effect is that of a philosophic poem based on the *vedantic* concepts of life and death. The critic and the thinker in Asan dominate the romantic, and so the poem lacks to some extent the fervour and the emotional intensity which are so needed in elegies. But *Oru Anutapam* (Condolence), an elegy on the death of his mother, is altogether a different poem. It is a spontaneous outburst of grief untrammelled by any philosophic questionings.

Gramavrukshathile Kuyil (The Koel on the Village Tree) merits special mention among his shorter works. Like most of his other lyrics, this one too was inspired by certain unhappy circumstances in his personal life. It so happened that his efforts at organising the S. N. D. P. Yogam earned for him some enemies who delighted in slandering him viciously. A stage was reached when he could no longer keep silent, and out of his distress was born this allegory which silenced his slanderers. The main characters are a koel which thrills the world with its melody and a god who comforts it when it is slandered by the very people to whom its melody is nectar. The immortal who knows the inestimable worth of that music comes down from his celestial abode and consoles the grieving bird with many profound counsels on the ways of the world. It is needless to explain that Asan, poet and servant of the people, who stands on a much higher plane than that of his slanderers, is himself the koel of this poem, and the immortal, his philosophic self which sustains him through all the adversities of life. *Gramavrukshathile Kuyil* also shows us a poet who is conscious of his gifts and a man who holds to the highest ethical principles.

This account of Asan and his works is too inadequate to give a full picture of his stature in Malayalam literature; it can at best only indicate in broad outlines the nature of his contribution to the poetic and social renaissance of the people of Kerala. It need only be added that he is second to none among the great moderns who harmonised in their works a lofty idealism and philosophic truths with remarkable social awareness and brought poetry as close to the realities of life as any poet could possibly do.

CHAPTER XVII

VALLATHOL

1. *A Deaf Man's Lament and Aniruddha in Prison*

Vallathol Narayana Menon, the well-known national poet, is the next name to be considered under the Romantic Movement. He began composing while still a boy, but it was not until his twentieth year that he thought of poetry as something different from a pastime. A classicist by training, he figured first among those who clung to the traditional school, but the tide of the Romantic Movement was rising, and soon he found himself gravitating in that direction.

His first poem to bear the clear stamp of a romantic imagination was *Badhira Vilapam* (A Deaf Man's Lament), published in 1910. The poet was then thirty-one. A distinguishing feature of this poem, rather an unusual one in those days, was that it was autobiographical: it was born of his distress on losing his auditory sense. The poet is naturally sad at the tragedy, but he draws consolation from his devotional fervour and his resignation to the inevitable. Life would now deny him some of its pleasures, but it would be foolish to be pessimistic. Rays of hope can, and do, penetrate through darkness, and one's losses are compensated in unpremeditated ways. This streak of optimism, evidenced first by *Badhira Vilapam*, runs like a golden thread throughout Vallathol's poetry.

But his first major undertaking which marks the beginning of a new and important phase in his career was *Bandhanasthanaya Aṅiruddhan* (Aniruddha in Prison), a *khanda kaya* brought out in 1914. Experiments were being widely tried by Malayali poets to perfect this poetic form after English patterns, and it was given to Vallathol to achieve the first major success. And it proved conclusively that the Romantic Movement had come to stay and that Vallathol would one day be a great force.

The theme of the poem is a pivotal sequence from the well-known puranic story of Usha and Aniruddha—the im-

prisonment of Aniruddha by Bana's soldiers and Usha's sad dilemma. It opens dramatically with Usha's altercations with her father's minister for permission to visit her lover who was taken into custody from her boudoir. The patriarchal minister is in a sad predicament, he is torn on the one side with his sympathy and affection for Usha and on the other, by his duty to the king. As for the heroine, she is rightly indignant towards her father for imprisoning a man who had come on her invitation. Hers is the mistake, if that were a mistake; let the king punish her, and not an innocent person. The minister is not impervious to the justice of her arguments, but he is duty-bound to defend the king who, with all his affection for his daughter, cannot help being angry at her conduct in entertaining the dynasty's enemy. He has to be concerned with the reactions of his subjects too. The old man pleads with Usha to view the position dispassionately, but she is too much engrossed in her love for Aniruddha to pay any heed to his exhortations.

The meeting of the lovers in prison and their conversation are portrayed with such feeling that the passage is justly one of the most famous in Malayalam poetry. It is a meeting between a heroine who is prepared to sacrifice her all, her kith and kin and even her very life for her love, and a hero who is full of resolution, chivalry and dignity. Vallathol exhibits a rare power in interpreting the situation intuitively and delineating it in a language charged with emotion. Such felicity in treating a love theme would seem to be a rare thing in *kavyas*.

Aniruddhan was composed at a time when the love of liberty and spirit of self-reliance innate to the women of Kerala had begun to show signs of a renascence under the impact of the new modes of living. The poem reflects this renascence in a very subtle manner. The Usha of the *kavya* is thus as much a puranic character as any brave young woman of modern Kerala. The self-confidence she displays in confronting her father's minister is immensely revealing of the new spirit:

> The guilt is mine, I sent for him,
> my lord had not arrived on his own;
> the transgressions, so various,

are one's own doing, and prison-gates
open unto the innocent—
is this the code of Bali's line?

And when Aniruddha altercates with her on the propriety of visiting a prisoner put behind bars by her father, this is how she replies him:

I know full well I merit death,
my sin being a grievous one
in sending thee to prison-gates:
And gladly will I meet my fate
contented immeasurably
at having been a hero's spouse.

Oru Kathu Athava Rugmiyute Paschathapam (An Epistle or Rugmi's Repentance) published in the same year also deals with a puranic theme. Rugmi who had once protested against the marriage of his sister Rugmini with Krishna and put many impediments in their way relents after many years and writes to his sister expressing regret over his past conduct. The immediate provocation for the epistle was his desire to see his daughter married to Pradyumna, Rugmini's son, but his repentence is evidently genuine and the poem is exceedingly beautiful with Rugmi's memories of his childhood spent with his sister. There is no reference in the puranas about such a letter being written by Rugmi; it would seem that the theme is the poet's own devising. Incidentally, the episode of Usha visiting her lover in prison also has no foundation in the puranas. Evidently, the romantic in Vallathol, being too powerful to be contented with retelling what has already been told, urged him to discover new possibilities in the old tales.

2. *Sahityamanjaris*

Meanwhile Vallathol was composing shorter poems for publication in magazines like *Kavana Koumudi* and *Atma Poshini*, and a collection of them was issued in 1916 under the title *Sahityamanjari* (Florilegium of Literature). It has

since been recognised as a landmark in Malayalam poetry, for not only were the pattern and the tone of the poems different from traditional types, they mark also the beginning of a new tradition which was to make much headway in later years. Vallathol himself brought out eight more collections under the same title, and each one has to be regarded as a milestone in the progress of modern poetry. The poems of the first collection—*Matruvandanam* (Salutations to the Motherland), *Matrubhumiyodu* (Ode to the Motherland), *Vira Patni* (The Brave Wife) etc. differ, first of all, from poems composed until then, thematically. *Matruvandanam* which is a hymn to Kerala who

> Reclines her head
> on the velvet of Sahya's green
> and pillows her feet
> on the calm sand-dunes

is a testament to the poet's all-absorbing patriotism. To poets of the earlier generation, patriotism was not a basic sentiment for poetry, whereas to Vallathol it was, and when he showed the way, it was not only a new theme, but also the beginning of a new school, as it were, in poetry. In the poem *Matrubhumiyodu*, we find him extol the glories of India's heritage and express his faith in her great destiny. And in *Vira Patni*, he narrates the tale of a simple woman of medieval Kerala who is a magnificent inspiration to her husband, a soldier, on his setting out for battle. The other poems of the collection like *Oru Kirathalayana* (A Torn Pillow) and *Oru Aripravu* (A Dove) also reveal certain features which were not quite so common in those days. It was seldom that poets chose themes from non-puranic sources. Vallathol besides being bold enough to deviate, could convince his public that there is poetry in themes which have a bearing on the everyday life of the people. Yet another new feature was that he adopted the eminently singable Dravidian metres for his poems. It needed much courage on his part, for those were days when anything non-Sanskritic was looked down upon in literary circles. Other poets also had adopted Dravidian metres, and a tendency did exist among poets of the younger generation to switch

over to indigenous forms, but the first major poet to do so with the deliberate intent of popularising them was Vallathol. *Oru Chitram* (A Portrait) of the first part of *Sahityamanjari* was his first poem to be composed in an indigenous metre, *Manjari*, and the music of the verse was so enchanting that many followed suit unhesitatingly. The poem is a portrait of the little Krishna holding a vessel and leaning against his foster-mother Yasoda as she sits milking the cow. The adoption of Dravidian metres for *khanda kavyas* is a major development in modern poetry, and to Vallathol is due the credit for initiating and popularising the innovation.

The second volume of *Sahityamanjari* (1918) contains poems of a profounder import. Titles like *Satya Gatha* (Ode to Truth), *Puranangal* (Puranas), *Pattil Potinja Teekkolli* (Smouldering Cinders Wrapped in Silk) and *Unnanilla, Udukkanilla* (Nothing to Eat, Nothing to Wear) are apparently indicative of their nature as well as scope. *Satya Gatha* is distinguished by a noble idealism, depth of ideas and concern for a mystic beauty. The poet envisages Truth as the presiding deity of the phenomenal and non-phenomenal manifestation of that Supreme Principle:

> How many blooms in the desolate waste
> which stretches endlessly above
> do the waves of thy wondrous effulgence
> cause to shine forth eternally!
> And in the turquoise-blue of the board
> of heavens which no directions know
> are etched, oh Goddess! in golden words
> aspects of thy majesty.

Lines like these which differ fundamentally from the narrative poems of the day indicated to his audience that he was moving away in new directions. *Puranangal* is primarily a hymn to the ancient seers of India and the wonderful literature they had bequeathed to the country. The poem opens with lines to the following effect:

> The sages of the days of yore
> who in India lived their lives,

seers to whom the foundations
of earth itself were transparent,
votaries of *yogic* ways
and self-sacrificing missionaries,
they lived in little dreary huts
thatched with grass and withered leaves:
But thence have accrued treasures which none
could appraise or from elsewhere have.
The reed-mats of those noble ones
were to the Muse of Poesy
pleasanter far than silken beds;
and to this day do we listen
unto her bangles jingling sweet
in the ageless *puranas*—
bangles which her arms had graced
and chimed while in her anxious love
she with her breast-cloth's flounces fanned
the foreheads of her adorers
whereon budded droplets of sweat
whenever too engrossed they sat
at their mystic avocations.
Ye, the benignant pleasantries
which the transcendant ascetics
bandied with the goddess Muse
during the brief respites they had
withdrawn from their contemplations—
Salutations unto thee!

The third and fourth parts of *Sahityamanjari* appeared in 1924. Some of the poems included in them, more notably *Radhyute Kritarthata* (Radha's Contentment), *Kilikkonchal* (A Parrot's Lispings) and *Ente Gurunathan* (My Master) had already captivated the public when they were first printed in journals. The first poem has for its theme a sentimental love story. A young man from town falls in love with an innocent peasant girl, but when once he leaves the village, he has no qualms about forgetting her and marrying another who met the requirements of his station in life. The deserted girl should naturally feel hurt, but she is the very personification of goodness and docility. She now writes to tell him

that she is thankful for the condescension he had shown in loving her and wished him well with all her heart. *Ente Gurunathan*, one of the most popular poems in Malayalam, is an ecstatic hymn sung by a disciple in praise of his master, Gandhiji.

> The wide, wide world is all his home,
> the grasses, plants and worms, kinsmen;
> his gains arise from sacrifice
> and glories from his lowliness;
> in him the *yogas* live their life—
> and thus my Master reigns supreme.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Bedecked be it in wreaths of stars
> or besmirched fast with muddy clouds,
> even and pure the heavens swell
> beyond the pale of lusts and stains:
> Untouched, likewise, by whims of life
> serene my Master reigns supreme.
>
> The country that the Gita bore
> alone could bear a seer like him
> who to *karma's* precepts betakes;
> the land that lies betwixt the arms
> of Vindhyas and the Himavant
> alone could rear a lion like him
> which to ascetic peace doth take;
> the land through which the Ganga flows
> alone could raise this *kalpaka*
> which yields for man eternal good.

Kilikkonchal is a delightful poem presenting Sita as a five year old girl playing about in the gardens of Mithila. It unfolds a fine artistic imagination and a fund of innocent humour. Two parrots arrive from the hermitage of Valmiki and sing the tale of the Ramayana as composed by the sage. When the little one listens to the portion which speaks of Rama's marriage with Sita, she runs up to her mother and demands an explanation from her as to what they mean by marriage. The mother tries to explain, but the little one is not convinced. "If ever I am to marry anyone," she declares, "it

should be my mother!" This is the theme of the poem. But what fascinates the reader more than the theme is the lovely panorama of Mithila in the *treta yuga* and the heart-warming sentiments of innocent love with which the poem is vibrant.

In the nine parts of *Sahityamanjari* brought out up to date, we have the best of Vallathol. The poems are short, but each is a masterly treatment of its theme, presented in as few lines as possible. The subjects embrace a very wide field—the poet's own experience of life, his observations on the experiences of others, social, political, historical, puranic, and so on. The manner of treatment is also as various as the themes themselves, the one common factor being that in all of them, there is the sure touch of a romantic. The pieces on the whole bear excellent testimony to the poet's vision and experience of life. His ability to plump its depths and realities, be his subject ever so commonplace, is impressive indeed. It may be the first grey hair that excites him, a torn pillow or the onset of the rains, but in all of them he finds some facet or other of human destiny. He sits in a garden of an evening and sees many sights, all familiar ones. But when once he begins to meditate upon their ultimate significance, his thoughts carry him over the whole range of human existence. Thus *Krishna Parunthu* (The Kite) is to him the symbol of the spirit, and the cranes which "hold aloft their heads, filled with clever designs to harm fellow beings" of arrant materialism. The intention of the allegory is obvious: to uphold the spiritual heritage of India in the face of crass imperialistic designs and materialistic ambitions. Vallathol possesses the felicity to invest every theme with some profound observations on life. The themes which draw out his best faculties, however, are those that have a bearing on Kerala or India. There is the unmistakable note of pride, even of arrogance, in his voice when he sings of his motherland, his native speech, the freedom of the country, its great sons.

A usual feature of his poetry is that it holds the mirror to the pleasanter and nobler aspects of life. There are, of course, many poems which convey the tragic faces of life too, like *Unnanilla Udukkanilla*, *Radhyute Kritharthata*, *Odukkathe Kurippu* (The Last Note) *Parikshayil Jayichu* (Success in the

Trial) and *Tukkumarathilum* (Even on the Gallows) which take the reader to some of the most dismal situations in life, but usually he shuns the morbid, he is cheerful and even witty.

But it would seem as though that he loves the ancient preceptors and heroes of India over everything else, whenever he tells a tale about them, or euologises them, his poetry becomes impassioned. Philosophers like Janaka, warriors like Parasurama, sages and bards like Valmiki and Vyasa—these are to him the greatest of men, and when they figure in his canvas, they take on a vital freshness and majesty. The Krishna of Ambadi is for him an image of, and a deity to be worshipped with, beauty. When he paints Balagopala with a vessel in hand and leaning against Yasoda as she milks the cow, and Akrura as he is overcome with *bhakti* on his visit to Ambadi, one gets the feeling of being in the presence of the loveliest visions vouchsafed for man. It would look as though the poet had gained visions of godhead, and that to paint such pictures of deities like Balagopala so tenderly and beautifully the inspiration had come from those visions. In the poem *Bhaktiyum Vibhaktiyum* (Devotion and Grammar) we find him wax into mystic raptures as he portrays the *diparadhana* (the ritualistic adoration of the deity with lamps) at the Guruvayoor temple. It is not mere devotion, it is a bliss born of the contemplation of beauty. Practically nothing that could add to the breath-taking loveliness of the setting at that auspicious moment is left out in the poem.

3. *National Songs*

Vallathol's claim to be ranked as a national poet, and the fame that goes with his name, rest primarily upon his poems which convey his ardent patriotism. The hey-day of his poetic career was that momentous epoch in Indian history when the country's struggle for freedom was, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, gaining momentum. Gandhi was his preceptor, even as he was to millions of his countrymen, and from the intensity of this adoration were born many hymns and odes to the Father of the Nation, including the famous *Ente Gurunathan*. A series of poems on various aspects of the

national struggle then poured forth from him, to inspire the freedom-fighters, to sustain them in their hour of trial and to convey the great message to the masses. He sings of the tricolour:

> Not enough! Not enough! Day by day
> let Mother Bharat's holy flags
> higher, yet higher rise!

It is a song that thrilled hundreds of thousands in Kerala during the struggle, and in lines like

> With the yarn we spin
> and the cloth we weave
> a shroud is made for Injustice;
> may this vine of eternal Liberty
> raised by us duteously
> shine for ever on the flagstaff of Truth!

it is not merely words of inspiration that he utters, there is in it a whole concept of freedom. And in poems like *Chakra Gatha* (Song of the Spinning Wheel) and *Khadi Vasanangal Kaikkolvin Evarum* (Accept Ye All Khadi Clothes) we find him urge his countrymen to accept the message of *khadi* and give up their infatuation for foreign goods. It is no exaggeration to say that one of the major factors that inspired and sustained the freedom movement in Kerala was Vallathol.

The movement for the eradication of untouchability originated by Gandhi was whole-heartedly welcomed by Vallathol and given due impetus. His poem *Toni Yatra* (A Travel by Boat) published as early as 1920 shows how profoundly distressed he was with the inequalities rampant in society. The boatman who carries the poet is an 'untouchable', one to whom reading and writing are forbidden. But he is a pious man, and he requests the poet, a caste-Hindu, for permission to recite from the Ramayana. It was a pleasant surprise to Vallathol, for he never imagined that one who stood so low in the rungs of the social ladder could be literate, let alone be devoted to the sacred tales. The poem glows with much indignation towards those who seek to perpetuate

such evils as untouchability, and forbid even the privilege of reading and writing to one's own brethren. In *Suddharil Suddhan* (A Simpleton Among Simpletons) we are told the curious tale of an old man who would rather have his house go up in flames than permit an 'untouchable' draw water from the nearby well to put out the flames:

> Let the house be burnt to ashes
> if burnt to ashes it should be;
> but cross ye not your boundary
> to touch my well and pollute it.

It has already been indicated that a recurrent note in Vallathol's poetry is his inordinate pride in India's heritage. It is this reverence for the glories that were that strengthened him in his love of his country and his passionate hopes for its future.

Of course, it is not a blind adoration of the good old days that he indulges in, his method is to interpret the old in terms of the new and indicate what strength the present and the future can draw from what has gone by. *Karmabhumiyute Pinchukal* (The Tender Feet of the Motherland) is a good instance of his skill in fusing the old with the new for purposes of energising his readers over issues like the freedom struggle. It is a short story-poem which tells the tale of Krishna, as a little cowherd boy, jumping into the river Kalindi which the dread serpent Kaliya flooded with poison. Krishna is warned by his playmates not to do so, but he is not a defeatist, he jumps into the waters, is stung by the serpent, but succeeds ultimately in taming it, dancing on its hoods. The episode is from the puranas and is not much of an allegory either, but the way he presents the scene and situation is apt to awaken his countrymen from their torpor, to fill them with confidence in their powers and prod them to action. Whatever be the theme, he finds in it some pertinent point to draw the attention of his public to the great heritage that is theirs. Volumes of the *Sahityamanjari* contain any number of such poems—*Katteliyute Kathu* (Letter from a Wild Rat) which is composed in the form of an epistle written by Sivaji from his hide-out to Jaya Simha who is deputed by

Aurangazeb to quell the Maharashtra power, *Malayalathinte Tala* (The Head of Malayalam) which presents Sankaracharya as offering his head to a Kapalika who believes that the performance of sacrificial rites with the head of a *sarvajna*, an all-knowing master, is the sure way to attain heaven, etc.

The philosophy of plain living and high thinking which ancient India upheld was to Vallathol an ideal worthy of translation into modern life. He believed with Gandhi that the concept of *Grama Swaraj*, the Village Republic, is not a utopia, but the only way to rejuvenate India and bring about the establishment of a simple and noble social order. Some of Vallathol's poems in this vein are dedicated to the farmer who has been the backbone of the country all through the ages.

But it was not always of the glories of the race and the nation that he sang, he would frequently get beyond the confines of nationalistic pride and sing of the world of the poor. The same attitude of mind which roused his indignation towards social cankers like untouchability is manifest when he sings of economic and class disabilities. Thus in the poems *Mappu* (Forgive) he confronts us with the haunting spectre of a labourer breathing his last in the yard of a railway station—a spectre which, with its hollow eyes, shruken cheeks bent nose, and skeletal frame, calls for a tear and some rethinking about our social order. The poet is rightly indignant towards that kind of a set-up which permits, nay even brings about, such tragedies. It is also worthy of note that the class concept which underlies it was a major issue with the poet long before the labour movement became a live force in Kerala. He was always a progressive and had a certain power of divination which enabled him to assess the trends of the times and think along progressive lines.

4. *The Major Khanda Kavyas*

Contemporaneous with the socio-political poems brought out in *Sahityamanjari* he composed some *khanda kavyas* also, mostly on themes taken from the puranas and the classics. These longer poems are accentuated in favour of propounding the more basic issues of life. *Sishyanum Makanum* (Disciple and

Son), *Kochu Sita*, *Magdalana Mariyam* (Mary Magdalene), and *Achchanum Makalum* (Father and Daughter) are his major poems in this category which have a didactical significance. The subjects are all familiar ones, but their treatment is singularly original and hardly owe anything to their sources. *Sishyanum Makanum* deals with a duel between Parasurama and Ganapati, Siva's disciple and son respectively. Ganapati is wounded in the fray, and Parvati, like a fond mother, is offended with her husband's disciple. Siva is in a sad predicament not knowing whom to uphold and whom to punish, for he would not discriminate between disciple and son. The commotion which rocks Mount Kailasa is finally allayed by the timely intervention of Radha and Krishna.

The characters are all gods, and the event takes place in a celestial abode. But the feeling one gets reading the poem is that of a domestic strife. Siva is a magnanimous father and master who is inclined to overlook the mischiefs of the juniors, but Parvati, the mistress of the house, is a doting mother who needs must champion her son. She reproaches her lord for not punishing his disciple, and tells him in a sarcastic manner, characteristic of women, that the reward he had now received in the form of her son's mutilation—one of his tusks was blown off—is adequate indeed for the lessons he gave his disciple! She gives her lord a bit more of her mind when she says that knowledge should be imparted to the deserving only. In fact, the poet takes a mischievous delight in divesting Parvati of all her divine majesty and showing us the woman, the wife and the mother in her.

It is commonly held that the best, and undoubtedly the most popular, *khanda kavya* of Vallathol is *Magdalana Mariyam*, a remarkable poem on the well-known Biblical story. No better testimony to its popularity, and the influence it exerted, is needed than to note that after its publication in 1921, no less than a dozen works were written in Malayalam on the same theme. The gospel account is accepted without any substantial deviation: Jesus sits at supper with His disciples in the house of the rich Simon, the repentent Magdalene approaches the Lord, washes His feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair and anoints them with precious ointment. The descriptions of the scenes and the situations in the poem

such as the bejewelled mansion bathed in the light of silver lamps, the coming of the Lord and His disciples upon the scene and the supper are extremely poetic, notwithstanding their realism. The appearance of Mary on the scene is another memorable passage:

> Why shouldst thou be thus scanning
> adown, ye stars! so intently?
> Hast from thy legions any strayed
> and fallen on the earth below?
> Ah, yes, it is a starlike shape
> upon the city's lonely ways;
> or is it a wee moon-spangle
> within the jasmine-white moonlight?
> Who is this lovely of every limb,
> and why in her such turbulence?
> Her high breasts heave beneath the pure
> white vesture across her shoulders thrown.

The story as presented by Vallathol does not detract from the divinity of Christ, but its denouement is such as could be justified also from the psychological point of view. Mary's repentence is so intense that her life is purged of its sins and her redemption ensues as a logical outcome. On the whole, *Magdalana Mariyam* is a unique poem which testifies to his great powers.

Achchanum Makalum (Father and Daughter) is a shorter work, but shows us Vallathol at his best. Its theme is a minor episode from the Sakuntala story—Viswamitra meets his deserted daughter, Sakuntala, in the hermitage of Kasyapa where with her son she leads the life of a *tapaswini*, but like a dewdrop reflecting the whole Universe, the panorama of Sakuntala's past life with its deep pathos flashes across our vision. It is a strange turn of fate that Viswamitra should be brought face to face with a daughter, deserted by her husband, and a grandson, years after his own desertion of Menaka on the birth of that daughter. But there is nothing melodramatic about it, it is a beautiful development. The love that now surges up in the sage's heart for his long-lost daughter is so great that, had she not like a long-suffering wife inter-

vened, he would that very moment have cursed Dushyanta for bringing on her so much grief. In allaying the wrath of the irate sage she does not forget to remind him of his own past conduct:

> Forsaken first by own parents, the unfortunate one
> has been abandoned at his will by husband too.

The reference fills him with remorse, and out of that repentence is born a new man. And when his all-consuming wrath and the might of his ascetic powers are thus tamed and sublimated by the love and forebearance displayed by his daughter, one gets the feeling that the poet has met a great challenge which the conflict of sentiments can pose.

There is another situation in the poem where the poet himself intervenes and propounds a memorable question. Viswamitra is captivated by a lovely little boy who plays about in the hermitage, and unaware of the fact that he is his own grandson, takes him in his arms and fondly embraces him. Asks the poet,

> May I enquire, oh mighty sage,
> which to thy heart appeals the more:
> the bliss in meditation, or the joy
> of embracing him, this flower-like child?

Vallathol did not have the benefit of English education, but he could, thanks to his innate love of knowledge and association with learned men, drink deeply from Western literatures and philosophical systems. The subtleties of Western poetry are discernible in the formal and thematic features of his *khanda kavyas* and lyrics. It is indeed a long way from the early *mahakavya*, *Chitryayogam*, to the shorter one, *Magdalana Mariyam*—the first, a product of thinking in terms of tradition, and the second, of a mature romantic ideal. The change is a profound one, and it demonstrates how adaptable Vallathol was to the spirit of the times.

CHAPTER XVIII

ULLUR

1. *Taraharam*

A contemporary of Asan and Vallathol, and equally well-known, Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer was a classicist to begin with, and a close follower of Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampuran. The stand that he took in the controversy on rhyme and substantiated with the *mahakavya Umakeralam* is by and large a natural outcome of his own views on poetry. But like most other poets of the day, he could not keep away long from the new ideologies, he had to fall in line with the Romantic Movement.

In 1915 Kerala Varma died, and though for a few more years he continued to write in the old style, it became apparent that in order to be in tune with the times he must revise his views on poetry. The poems of Asan and Vallathol on social and political themes were received more enthusiastically by the public than those of the traditionalists, and that convinced him more than anything else that a change was imperative. The two major revisions which he effected in the light of his assessment of the new tendencies were the giving up of the 'second-letter-rhyme' which he once held as indispensable and the adoption of Dravidian metres, inspired evidently by the popularity of Vallathol's compositions. He could not however discuss social and political subjects immediately—he was a servant of the Travancore State—but he could, in due course, make noteworthy contributions in this direction also. The shorter poems composed after *Umakeralam* —they number well over hundred and fifty—have been collected in *Arunodayam* (Sunrise), *Taraharam* (Garland of Stars), *Kiranavali* (A Sheaf of Rays), *Tarangini* (The River), *Ratnamala* (Necklace of Gems), *Manimanjusha* (Bunch of Gems), *Kalpasakhi* (The Celestial Tree), *Amrutadhara* (An Ambrosial Shower), *Dipavali* (Festival of Lights), *Chitrasala* (Portrait Gallery) and *Taptahrudayam* (A Sorrowing Heart). But the more important among his later-day compositions, however, are his *khanda kavyas—Pingala*, *Karnabhushanam* (Karna's Ear-ring) and *Bhakti-*

dipika (Lamp of Devotion). It is difficult to make an exhaustive list of all his works, they are so numerous and various, but reference has also to be made of *Sujatodvaham*, a *champu*, *Mangalamanjari* and *Vanchisa Giti*. And towering over them all is the *mahakavya*, *Umakeralam*.

The vicissitudes which came over Ullur's idea of poetry would be apparent from an examination of his collections in their chronological sequence. *Arunodayam*, published after *Umakeralam*, marks the transitional phase between his classical and romantic periods. Most of the poems in this collection are on legendary and puranic themes and are the products of his collaboration with other poets.

The poems brought out after *Arunodayam* bear the unmistakable stamp of his romantic inclinations. There was no apparent philosophic stance in his earlier works except perhaps loyalty to the ruler and devotion to the Motherland. Poetry was to him and to his friends hardly anything more than a pleasant pastime and a medium of friendly communion. But it dawned on him slowly that a poet should have some ideals to uphold and that poetry should be rooted in the profounder issues of life. The poems composed since that realisation are comparatively free from the inordinate love of words that he once indulged in and hold the mirror to the diverse facets of life. They have ever since been as much portrayals of life as commentaries thereon.

Taraharam, the next major collection, contains his first pieces—*Periyarinodu* (Ode to the River Periyar), *Mazhathulli* (Raindrop), *Ente Swapnam* (My Dream) and *Eppol?* (When?), for instance—which bear out adequately the change which came over him. Of course *Taraharam* does not register a complete break with tradition, it is still to some extent transitional, but it does indicate that he had moved a good distance away from the *mahakavya* tradition. That Ullur never effects a complete break with classicism is a noteworthy feature of his poetry. His *khanda kavyas* reveal a classical imagination, and even in the shorter poems conceived on the pattern of Vallathol's *Satya Gatha* and *Matrubhumiyodu*, he loves to describe and to elaborate rather than concentrate on cardinal principles. This tendency to elaborate makes his poems informative and

didactical, but in the process they lose inevitably much of their artistic qualities. *Periyarinodu* is a good illustration of the strength and weakness inherent in such a method. In the three hundred odd lines of the poem, we have the landscape, as it were, of one of the foremost rivers of Kerala. It presents the scenic splendours of the terrain through which it flows, the kind of people who inhabit its banks and its puranic and historical associations. All that could have gone well with the poem, provided they were left as incidental suggestions. But as it is, it is these details which dominate the poem. It is also heavy with the poet's immense erudition, and a tough style. The frequent allusions to puranic episodes, an inordinate love of figures of speech, plural meanings suggested by the clever manipulation of words, the tendency to philosophise and the exuberant use of Sanskrit words and clichés contribute to the stiffness of his style.

Mazhathulli (Raindrop) exemplifies another feature of his poetry—his love of and mastery over the figure of speech, *ullekha*. Essentially hyperbolic, it is a poetic devise capable of conjuring up images of breath-taking beauty. But its unimaginative use would make poetry a ludicrous exercise in classical rhetorics. Ullur's *ullekhas* are not without shortcomings, but they testify on the whole to the wealth of his imagination, his aesthetic sensibilities and plenitude of ideas. They show his rare ability to bring out the beauty inherent even in the commonplace and trivial things and lead the reader on to the deeper recesses of life. *Mazhathulli* is a string of *ullekhas*. Every stanza of it is a beam of light which illumines the theme as a whole. A raindrop falls to the earth from the bosom of the skies—and unnumbered imageries flow forth from the poet. Asan delineated the splendour and the tragedy of human life in terms of a fallen flower, and Ullur does the same, more or less, through a raindrop. The cloud mothered the raindrop but the raindrop would not rest under its protecting wings, it sallies forth into the dust of the earth. And how sad indeed should that mother be! She laments her loss stretching her "arms with bangles of lightning decked", disconsolately, unceasingly. As for the child lost to her, it is a symbol of sheer beauty:

The celestial sages would love to caress thee,
the eternal nymphs to sing thy lullabies;
Surabhi would love to suckle thee!
indeed how noble thy birth, thy charms!

The portrayal of the charms of the raindrop and the grief it occasions to its mother is but one aspect of the poem. There is another, and a more important one, which calls for profounder thinking.

The falling off of the raindrop may be a loss to heaven, but it is a great gain to the earth which had been thirsting for it and is now receiving it warmly. It is self-sacrifice itself, for in what diverse ways can it not quench the thirst of the earth! It can quench the *chataka* bird which knows no other source. Or, entering the oyster, it can transform itself into a pearl which, in good time, would

become the gem adorning the nose
of a beauty brimming with youth.

Or again, it can give a new lease of life to the rose flower languishing in the hot sun. Thus the life of the raindrop though evanescent is sublime and full, because its mission is one of self-sacrifice.

2. *The Preceptor in Ullur*

The shorter poems collected under the various titles referred to above cover a wide field—the poet's reactions to contemporary events, his philosophy of life and exhortations to compatriots. As a raconteur, however, he is not as adept as Asan or Vallathol. Be the theme something objective or his own volitions on some issue of life, he is more a philosopher than an artist. An apparent weakness of his poetry is this, that his concern for the didactic often hinders its even flow and dilutes its emotional intensity. It is evident even in pieces which require a highly imaginative approach. Some of them are exclusively aphoristic in style and in content. It would seem as though that Ullur is particular that a poem should be as much philosophical as it is artistic, if not more. Sometimes

it is through a story that he achieves his objective, sometimes it is direct exhortation. Whatever the theme, seldom can we find a poem in his later-day collections which does not point to a moral. And the highest moral plane to which man can rise, according to him, is the plane of self-sacrifice and service unto fellowmen.

There is not much of an elaboration in the story-poem *Kabiradasan*, but there is some stretching of it in *Hira*. The first poem presents Kabirdas as a poor boy selling cloth, parting with his wares to a Muslim *fakir* who begged for them and the second, a maid-in-waiting sacrificing her own child to save that of her royal mistress. There is much grandiloquence in *Hira*, but its pathos sustains its poetry.

Vicharadhara (Stream of Thought), on the other hand, is clearly preceptive. It presents two characters, a low-caste maiden carrying a load of fodder on her head and a young woman of noble lineage with her child in her arms. The sight of the former rouses in the mother a series of thoughts on the gulf that yawns between the two, the caste system particularly, and she opens her heart to her child. Apparently the poem is an attempt, after Asan and Vallathol, to discuss social themes, but the approach is radically different. There is no loud condemnation of the existing state of affairs; on the other hand, it is an idealisation of the 'untouchable' and the glorification of the beauties that are in that life. Be her garments ever so miserable, she is a spark of the Supreme Being and, as such, is beautiful. The poet pauses on the splendours of the life of the tiller of the field, and lavishes deep rich colours in painting him. The very first lines are indicative of the general trend of the poem:

> See the Nili, dear child,
> the lowly one who comes this way:
> The age of Kali which doesn't prescribe
> pollution for the eyes also
> is not so cruel, after all.

The picture of the low-caste maiden is drawn with much sympathy:

An expert attendant is this maid
who dresses the lovely verdure tresses
of goddess Nature,
combing well and incessantly.

It is not possible in this short survey to refer even to the more important among his shorter poems, they are so many, and their themes so diverse. A good proportion of them is based on episodes from the Mahabharata, the purana *par excellence* which was Ullur's main pabulum. The poems reveal how intimately familiar he was with the epic, how profound his understanding of it was and how proud of the Bharata Varsha which it mirrors. It is evident that his discovery of India was through the Mahabharata. Whenever he dwells on present-day decadence, the ideal he points out as worthy of realisation is that bygone golden age. He is never tired of portraying in glowing colours the idealism of the ancient past when all the values of life which ennoble humanity were zealously upheld, and contrasting the same with the unethical, self-seeking, spiteful and competitive ways of the present. In the poem, *Annum Innum* (Then and Now) we are shown, as in a flash, the great personages of the past—the heroes, the masters, the heroines and above all, Lord Krishna who shone as the crowning gem of them all, expounder of the Gita—and laments when again India will mother such a galaxy of great souls. But he is not disappointed, he visualises a new dawn when she will come into her own:

The cocks trumpet
the glories of the dawn;
the green birds shower
nectar in our ears;
the zephyr sprinkles
the fragrance of the blooms;
the earth echoes
the boom of the conch.
And lo! he comes,
the high-priest of Time,
to crown the Orient
with the crown of Glory!

But how indeed can we arrive at such a dawn?

Pure at heart and in our ways
and persevering we raise ourselves,
India again, oh Indians,
will be the heaven of yore!

Purity and perseverence: these are the key-words in Ullur's philosophic system. There is no morality that is not rooted in the purity of heart. The features of a pure life are selflessness and devotion to fellowmen. Love of all created things, faith in the universal brotherhood of man and the conviction that men are equal are, according to Ullur, the forces which ennoble life. A life in accordance with these high principles is the ideal that a man should strive for.

The works of his later years reveal the remarkable maturity and mellowness that his heart and intellect attained with the years. In poems like *Sukham Sukham* (Happiness, Happiness) *Prema Sangitam* (Music of Love), *Bhavana Gati* (The Course of Imagination), and *Utbodhanam* (Exhortations), we find a a preceptor rich with the experience of life. The theme of *Sukham Sukham* is this: The good that man sets before him is happiness, and for this he exerts immensely, restlessly. But in fact he is 'searching the wilderness' for something that is already in his hands. The moment it dawns on him to love and to be self-sacrificing, he gains that happiness for which he is searching. A most enchanting work of Ullur, and justly one of the most famous in Malayalam, is *Prema Sangitam*, a fine lyric extolling all that is good and true and beautiful in life:

To him who holds the lamp
the world is bathed in light:
to him whose heart is pure
existence is ambrosial;
without the seer, not a thing
in all the world is deemed to be:
Where amidst God's creations
do we not find unions?
Innate in all the world of things
is the power of attraction;

primordial with all living
the power of mutual love;
advancement comes of humility,
the fruit, of planting
and gains, of charity:
We indeed our heavens build
and likewise our hell—

so runs the poem. The verse is aphoristic in diction, but its haunting melody and the warm imageries with which it is interspersed raise it to the level of high poetry.

3. *Khanda kavyas*

Pingala, *Karna Bhushanam*, and *Bhakti Dipika*, are as *khanda kavyas*, fairly long compositions. The first poem is conceived more or less on the pattern of Vallathol's *Magdalana Mariyam*, and tells the tale of the conversion of a courtesan of Mithila. *Bhakti Dipika* is as much devotional in theme as critical of the caste system. Sanandana, disciple of the great Sankaracharya, undertakes arduous penances to gain a vision of Narasimhamurti, but his efforts come to nought. But the unlettered Chathan, an 'untouchable' from the hills, could not only make the god appear, but drag him, tied to a rope, to Sanandana thanks to the sincerity of his devotion.

The crowning glory of Ullur's poetry is *Karna Bhushanam*. In no other poem is he so sure of his philosophy and his poetry. It may well be described as the nectar he produced by his churning of the Mahabharata. The central figure of the poem is the brave Karna, that symbol of charity, steadfastness and self-sacrifice, and the context, the eve of the great war. The poet identifies himself so unreservedly with the puranic hero and the circumstances of his life that the drama is brought out fully and poignantly. There is a feeling in both the camps of war that inevitably there would be a mortal fight between Arjuna and Karna, and that that would decide the fortunes of the battle. But it is well known that Karna would be invincible so long as he is shielded by the ear-rings which he had inherited under divine circumstances at the moment of his birth. This worries Indra, Arjuna's father, who is

concerned about the safety of his son. The only way to ensure Arjuna's safety and victory, Indra decides, would be to deprive Karna of his amulet, and this, he feels, would not be difficult, for Karna is the very personification of charity. He resolves to come down to Karna disguised as a poor Brahmin and beg for the ear-rings as a gift. But Karna too has his patron among the gods, his father Aditya, Sun, who is equally anxious about his son's safety. He now hears of Indra's designs and in order to thwart them, comes to Karna in the guise of a mortal and advises him against parting with his ear-rings. But Karna cannot be dissuaded, to him his code of charity is dearer than his very life. Be he Indra or any other, be it his ear-rings or shield or anything else in his possession, if it is a question of charity, there can be no argument about it. In that clash between Aditya and Karna, between a father's love and the son's love of his principles, we have some of the sublimest sentiments which human relationships and righteous conduct involve. Here poetry takes on a grand diction and soars into an indescribable eloquence. Charity decides the issue and Aditya who came down to convert his son is himself converted. The parting between the son who adheres to his principles and is speeding on the way to death, and the father who is all affection for his son and is proud of him, is one of the memorable situations in the poem, touchingly delineated:

> Embracing his son once again
> and deeming himself most fortunate,
> into the skies rose Aditya,
> eyes unwinking in a backward gaze.

Poems like *Chitrasala* (Portrait Gallery) show further how greatly Ullur prided in the India of the past. They are full of lofty meditations on the ultimate values of life upheld by the ancients. The concern for imageries and other devices which impart different shades of meaning to an expression is never completely given up, but whereas in his earlier years he cared more for a pompous diction than a sustained thought-process, the later poems reveal his preoccupation with lofty ideas and a consistent philosophy of life. True, his *ullekhas*

and his eloquence are not so easy of comprehension, but it needs no iteration that his works have all the enduring qualities worthy of the noblest poetry and that he will always rank high among the thinkers and idealists of Kerala.

CHAPTER XIX

ROMANTIC POETRY—AFTER ASAN AND VALLATHOL

1. *Nalappattu Narayana Menon*

The view is generally held in Kerala that there is at present some sort of a crisis in poetic activity. The protagonists of this view point out that no poet of the stature of any of the trinity of Romantic Poetry has since come up and that poetry itself has lost something of its former glory. But a student of literary history would not accept this theory, he would only say that the alleged crisis is only one of those periodical lulls which occur in any literature. And in no literature has poetry been consistently good, nor have great poets graced every generation. New vistas are opened only once in a way and masters of unprecedented stature are indeed a rare phenomenon. The view that poetry has come to a standstill is, therefore, fallacious. Lulls like the present are nothing uncommon in the annals of growing literatures. Poetry today is as much a living and growing organism as it has ever been.

Poets of the younger generation who wrote under the shadow of the trinity have themselves made no mean contributions. A few alone could rise to any eminence, but each one of them has produced something which is counted outstanding. A good instance would be *Kannunirthulli* (Teardrop) of Nalappattu Narayana Menon (1887-1955), friend and follower of Vallathol. It is a poem which stands comparison with the very best in Malayalam. Its style is much the same as Vallathol's, but its thought content shows a certain kinship with Asan's. When he combined the flowery musical style of the former with the introspective qualities of the latter, we have a highly individualistic kind of poetry worthy of being ranked among the best. But Menon did not produce much. He composed only one other poem of comparable quality, *Chakravalam* (Horizon), which is metaphysical in tone.

Kannunirthulli is a threnody born of the poet's sorrow on the death of his wife. As an elegy, it stands apart from all

others in the same category. It is quite different from *Oru Vilapam* of V. C. Balakrishna Panicker and *Prarodanam* of Asan, and ranks above both of them with its transparent sincerity. There is no melodrama in it, nor any excessive concern with philosophic questions. The thoughts go deep indeed, but the verse is so lucid that its treasures can be discovered at a glance.

The great success of the poem is that the poet has translated his heart truly and without recourse to the conventional poetic devices. The couple are of the same age and, coming from neighbouring houses, playmates since childhood. They have many difficulties in coming together in wedlock, but when once they could, life to them is an endless joy. But their happiness proves short-lived: she dies in her first child-birth. The husband struggles with his grief and seeks solace in idealizing it into a poem.

The poet is no mere mourner, he is an ascetic as well who can summon whole philosophical systems for his comfort. But, as it turns out, his sorrow is too much for any system to allay. He holds the torch along the labyrinths of the Universe and the mysteries of creation, and he could gather from them all countless explanations for the whims of destiny. But none, alas, could prove a source of consolation.

The poet is aware that the human intellect cannot trace every effect to a rational cause:

> Unending, unknowable, untellable,
> the way the Universe moves;
> and what indeed can man realise
> peering from his corner?

It is possible, however, that the present grief is designed to bring about some ultimate good:

> The Smith of the Cosmos smelts the gold
> of the human heart again and again
> and dips the same in the tears of man
> to fashion something inestimable.

But all such conjectures cannot assuage the bereaved heart.

The seers may tell us that the world is an illusory trifle but,

> the world to me was invaluable
> when that loving face was wreathed in joy.

He believes that sometime during subsequent births, she would again be his, but

> will Destiny be ever able
> to create the same state of felicity?

The sublimest aspects of love alone are treated in the poem, and these have never been reduced to abstractions. He paints their life as lovers as one of heavenly happiness:

> Same the toys, same the game,
> same the play-hut, emotions same:
> Each to the other spread a shade—
> and thus we spent our childhood days.

Thus their childhood was "heaven made on earth"; their connubial life showed them "the bliss of all the world in the exchange of their glances," and their dreams fondled a little child and felt the joy that is in such fondling. There are situations in the *kavya* which, in the hands of most other poets, might easily have lapsed into exercises in the erotic but transformed by Menon into a vision of sublimest love.

2. *Kuttippuram and Others*

Besides Nalappattu Narayana Menon there were a few other poets who came to the forefront during the days of the trinity: Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair and Vallathol Gopala Menon who specialized in the Vallathol style; M. R. Krishna Varier who evolved a simple idiom and composed on themes taken from the humbler classes of society; V. Unnikrishnan Nair who was captivated by Tagore; Sardar K. M. Panicker and Pallathu Raman who coalesced Western poetic ideals with Indian philosophy, and others.

Kuttippuram has not composed much. His major works

are *Kavyopaharam* (A Poetic Offering), a collection which contains many poems of a mould far removed from the older tradition, and the *khanda kavya*, *Gramina Kanyaka* (A Village Virgin), a story-poem which extols the innocent beauties of rural life. Unnikrishnan Nair has published some fine translations and adaptations of Tagore with a view to attracting the attention of his compatriots to the great poet. Of his original works, the collection *Kaladippadukal* (Foot-prints) and the *kavya*, *Lakshmana Vishadam* (Sorrows of Laksmana) which is on the Ramayana hero, deserve special mention. The simple and direct idiom of M. R. Krishna Varier approximates to the present-day tendencies. There was something new about his themes also. He had no hesitation in choosing his subjects from the lowest rungs of society, to make heroes out of the humblest people long before the 'progressive' poets of the subsequent years elected to do so with a view to ventilating their socio-political ideologies.

Pallathu Raman began by being a bard of Nature and ended up as an apostle of social revolution. There is a certain individuality about his poetry. Born in the same depressed community in which Asan was born, his works are coloured with indictments of the social order which permits inequalities and orthodoxies. Another dominant feature of his works, in poetry as well as in prose, is his admiration of medieval chivalry. The Rajput lore provided him with any number of ideal themes to lavish his love of valour, and thus were born poems like *Virangana* (The Brave Woman), *Pulikkoottil* (In the Leopard's Cage) and *Vira Simhi* (The Brave Lioness)—all tributes to Rajput heroes and heroines. This love of valour led him gradually, and naturally, into the fold of the revolutionaries. The poems of his last days are in fact so may challenges hurled at the socio-economic system which perpetuates all kinds of injustices. The very titles of his poems—*Panjakkudil* (The Hungry Hut), *Arival Ganam* (Song of the Sickle), *Munnaniyilekku* (To the Forefront) and *Chuttika* (The Hammer) for instance—are indicative of his revolutionary fervour.

3. *Sardar Panicker*

Sardar K. M. Panicker could anticipate the new tendencies

early enough and enrich modern poetry in a variety of ways. He earned for himself a name in Malayalam poetry even during his student days at Oxford (1914-18). The poems which he then published in the magazine *Kavana Koumudi* sounded a new note, conceived as they were on the model of the sonnet and other types of subjective poetry. These poems have since been collected in the volume *Apakwa Phalam* (Immature Fruit). Moreover, there was something novel about his themes—for example, the farewell to his wife on his leaving for England, his experiences in those unfamiliar surroundings, his return voyage etc. Panicker was also among the earliest poets of Kerala to voice the desirability of substituting Sanskrit metres with indigenous ones and substantiated the same with own poems. An article published by him in *Bhashavilasam*, a special number of *Kavana Koumudi*, in 1915 gave rise to some controversies on the subject, but subsequently his views came to be accepted by a wide circle.

Since then Panicker's talents branched off in many directions. He has handled a wide variety of forms and themes with equal facility and success. Thus *Chinta Tarangini* (A Thought Stream) and *Amruta Lahari* (An Ambrosial Intoxication) are didactic compositions; *Prema Giti* (Love Song), *Balikamatam* (Will of the Fair One) and *Chadukti Muktavali* (A Romantic Colloquy) erotic in tone; *Bhupa Sandesam* (The King-Messenger) is a *sandesa kavya; Hyder Naicken*, a *champu; Panki Parinayam* (Panki's Marriage), *Sukumara Vijayam* (Sukumaran's Success) and *Cinema Taram* (The Film Star), satires; *Rasika Rasayanam*, a translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat;* and *Ina Pravukal* (A Pair of Doves) an adaptation of a work in Chinese. We have also to take note of his translations of Kalidasa's *Kumara Sambhava*, Sophocles' *Oedipus* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and many other original poems like *Velu Tampi Dalava*, *Kurukshetrathile Gandhari* (Gandhari at Kurukshetra) and *Ambapali.*

Panicker's is a simple and elegant style. He has no difficulty in expressing himself; and the reader understands him quite easily. He is equally at home in all kinds of *rasas*—the erotic, the heroic, the patrtiotic, etc—and all kinds of themes ranging from satire and parody to the subtlest philosophy.

4. *Vennikkulam Gopala Kurup*

Vennikkulam bears the clear stamp of Vallathol, in regard to language especially. He has brought out many collections of shorter poems—*Soundarya Puja* (Adoration of Beauty), *Vasantolsavam* (The Festival of Spring), *Pushpavrushti* (A Shower of Flowers), *Vellithalam* (The Silver Plate), *Manasaputri* (The Dream Daughter), *Sarovaram* (The Sea), *Kerala Sri* (The Glory of Kerala) etc., and some translations like the *Kural* of Tiruvalluvar. The hallmark of his poetry is not so much the range of his vision nor the depth of his thoughts as the facility of his style. In fact there are not many poets in Kerala who can put so much melody and grace into the verse as Vennikkulam could. The transparency and the spontaneity of his poems are remarkable.

The favourite themes of Vennikkulam are those that extol the beauty that is in human relationships: between mother and child, father and child, master and disciple, man and man. Almost all his poems are filled with charming pictures illustrative of noble sentiments which beautify life. Generally speaking, the mission of his muse would seem to be to adore and emphasise the manifold aspects of that all-pervading force vaguely termed Love. The dark and bitter sides of life are as far as possible eschewed in his scheme of things, he delights in all that is serene and lofty and lovely. Of course, he can deal with even the morbid and the mutinous with equal facility, only he does not like them.

5. *Balamani Amma*

Balamani Amma is a premier poetess of the day, and her contributions, to lyrical poetry especially, are outstanding. Her very first collection, *Kuppukai* (Obeisance) has since been regarded as a major event in contemporary poetry. Immature though a good proportion of the poems included in it is, it proclaimed in no uncertain terms the advent of an aesthete and a philosopher united in one. Her *Amma* (Mother) is a lyrical *khanda kavya* which combines the aesthetic with the philosophic most artistically, but what is more important is that it is empirical in origin and conception. It is a fascinating picture of a young mother's heart—its dreams and raptures,

its sorrows and anxieties—, of experiences which are not vouchsafed to other poets in the same measure, and cannot be adequately expressed by those who have had the experience, though. She has captured every shade of the mother-and-child relationship on her canvas, and with profound insight.

Balamani Amma has since brought out a few other collections and *kavyas* like *Kudumbini* (The Wife), *Dharma Margathil* (On the Path of Duty), *Sthree Hridayam* (The Woman's Heart), *Bhavanayil* (Realms of Imagination), *Prabhankuram* (Buds of Light) and so on, all in the same empirical tone, but the core of her heart is nowhere better expressed than in *Amma*. Her later-day poems are weighted in favour of the *vedantic* with the result that they are less warm and their appeal, less direct. The tendency to allegory and mysticism which was faintly discernible in her earlier works has now come to the surface, and an intellectual approach on the part of the reader has become necessary. Her recent poem *Lokantarangalil* (Beyond Phenomena) is an exercise in metaphysics in spite of its being an elegy on the death of her uncle, Nalappattu Narayana Menon.

The other poetesses of the day who deserve mention are K. Madhavi Amma, Mary John Thottam, Mary John Koothattukulam and Mutukulam Parvati Amma.

6. *P. Kunhiraman Nair*

A romantic and a poet of the spirit, P. Kunhiraman Nair stands apart from most others in that he is disarmingly sincere and has evolved a highly individualistic lyrical style. He has a philosophy for poetry: "It is not a mantle for the body, it is the wings of the soul." The good majority of his poems being devotional, he bears the popular appellation of *Bhakta Kavi*, "Devotional Poet".

But he is not a mere hymnologist of the old school, his ardour embraces unlimited spheres, the whole spiritual life of man. His sincerity, the intensity of his feelings, the directness and spontaneity of his verse—all these infuse his poetry with an extraordinary power and elevate it to a high lyrical plane. There is in it the glorification of that infinite love

which his gods symbolise, an excessive reverence for life, the exquisite fragrance of the Kerala earth. The devotional fervour which fills his heart flows forth naturally and incessantly in choice words and brilliant imageries. And speaking of his imageries, they are typical of him, and the primordial characteristics of Kerala's landscape and culture. They take us to the depths of the Arabian Sea, the heights of the Sahya mountains, the green of the unending rice-fields, the luxuriance of the coconut groves, the serenity of the shrines, the temple-tanks, the groves and lawns, the life in hamlets which rises to a delirious tempo during festivals like Onam, Vishu and Tiruvatira, the joy that expresses itself in the group-dances of the fair sex like *Kaikottikkali*, in shouts like the *aarpuu*, in chorals like *kurava*.

7. *K. K. Raja*

K. K. Raja is introspective and pessimistic. He does not compose long poems, he contents himself with sonnets, odes and similar other shorter forms. His collections like *Tulasi-damam* (Chain of Tulasi Blooms) and *Vellithoni* (The Silver Boat) are well-known in contemporary poetry. The one long poem he wrote is *Bashpanjali* (Tear Offering), an elegy on the death of a friend. He has been composing since the last three decades and though he has not produced *kavyas* in the conventional sense, what he has done is original and intense and will endure. There is an undercurrent of sorrow and pessimism in his poems which, in his view, is indispensable in poetry. "If pessimism is a weakness, be it so; for me, it is indispensable." But there are no loud wailings, he is a thinker and his sorrow is tempered by his philosophy. There is no complexity in his thought-processes, each poem is concentrated on a single idea or emotion.

8. *N. Gopala Pillai*

There is something of a paradox about N. Gopala Pillai. He is a great scholar in Sanskrit and a critic with a deep sense of values. But his poetry is not only free from the burden of his scholarship, it is simple and transparent and clothed in a

melody which enhances greatly the basic mood of the theme. He has been a lyrical poet from the very beginning, that is, ever since Malayalam poetry took a lyrical and romantic turn. The two major influences of those days were Tagore and Vallathol, and most of the poets chose between the two. But Gopala Pillai did not fall in line with any one of them, he evolved for himself a golden mean which not only could express him fully, but also bear the stamp of his personality. The poems of his early days—and he has not written much—are collected in *Navamukulangal* (New Buds). These poems which are among his earliest in a lyrical vein are characterised by a lambent imagination and a remarkable clarity and simplicity. A mystic enraptured by his visions and a philosopher who knows the truths of existence, he could impart to his poems the warmth of his personality.

That he can compose with equal skill in Sanskrit also deserves special mention. His versions of Ullur's *Prema Sangitam* and Asan's *Chintavishtayaya Sita* excel even the originals in the textural qualities of the verse.

9. *Bodheswaran*

Bodheswaran is a romantic who delights in his own volitions. His poems, however, are born of his clash with the circumstances of life. The dominant mood is sorrow, but often he bursts out into revolutionary slogans. One can come across both *vedantic* philosophy and the epicurean ideals of Charvaka in his poetry. His *Hrudayankuram* (Bud of the Heart) published in 1931 is a well-known collection containing rhapsodies of love and philosophic explorations, passionate outbursts and clash of ideals and call to arms.

CHAPTER XX

G. SANKARA KURUP

1. *Worship of Nature*

Foremost among the successors of the great romantics is G. Sankara Kurup, the most important poet of the day. He began by being a lover of Nature and a worshipper of its beauties since he made his entry into the poetic stage sometime about 1917. There is in his earlier verse the clear imprint of Vallathol's flowery idiom and Ullur's *ullekhas*, but his imagination and his ideals owe their strength and fervour to Tagore. "I know not another poet," he confesses, "who widened the horizons of my imagination and influenced the ideals of my poetry as much as Tagore."

The early phase was evidently imitative, but even then he had an individuality which distinguished him from most other poets of the time. He did not have the benefit of an English education—he holds only a degree in Oriental Languages—but he cultivated the language so assiduously that in due course he could master the treasures of its literature and widen the range of his vision. His own inclinations corresponded with the ideals of the English Romantics, and he found in them the strength to sustain him in his concept of poetry. The lessons that he took from them, Shelley in particular, have left their mark in a good proportion of his poetry.

The early poems of Sankara Kurup have since been collected in the four parts of *Sahitya Kautukam*. These poems reveal his tendency at not merely imitating Vallathol and Ullur, but improving upon them in his own way. For instance, the worship of Nature is not for him merely a joy in itself which was the case with the masters, but a commentary on life as well. Thus the evening star which once surprised him—he addresses it thus—

> Who art thou, thou bodied Bliss?
> Like to the *tilak* which bedecks
> the beauty of the Universe,

like to a lovely unfading bloom
which the ear of the west adorns?—

has now for him an allegoric significance: it preaches the gospel of self-sacrifice through its own example. Thus his *Nakshatra Gitam* (Song of the Star) concludes with lines to the following effect:

I may swoon and break away
and be engulfed in the firmament's depths,
or, maybe, to ashes turn
burning out; and then would Time
forget me, a trivial thing.
But this is true, that while for me
life remained a hot furnace
the Earth I illumed with that light.

Evidently, the transition has been in favour of relating poetry to the ulterior questions of human life. The thoughts go deeper, but there is no lessening of the power of imagination. It was possible for him to effect such a transition because his own experience of life gained in intensity with the passing of years.

However it was not the material or social circumstances of life that added to his poetry this intensity. He adored Nature from the very beginning, and then he began to feel in her presence a new meaning. He discovered too that this indescribable experience corresponded with the mystical raptures of the Sufis and his own preceptor, Tagore. In fact, he felt in his being that he was becoming a mystic. The subliminal principles which sustained him in this phase were the same that all other mystics proclaim: there is a Primordial Force animating the visible phenomena and the poet is but only an instrument at the service of that Force. His poems like *Anweshanam* (Quest), *Pankaja Gitam* (Song of the Lotus) and *Sakshalkaram* (Fulfilment) are all conceived in this key.

It is well-known that the inadequacy of language is nowhere more keenly felt than while translating mystic experiences. The usual device to which poets resort while confronted with such a difficulty is to adopt symbols and allegory. And

this is what Kurup also has done and symbolism has come to stay as a chief feature of his poetry.

Though the tendency to resort to symbols is discernible in the poems of *Sahitya Koutukam* too, Kurup's style on the whole was direct and simple. But when his experiences became more intense and complex, it was inevitable that he should take to an allegorical language for the fullest articulation. Symbols are not easily amenable to a poet's will, nor do they occur to everyone spontaneously. In Sankara Kurup's case, however, symbols have a felicitous quality.

2. *The Patriot in Kurup*

But he is not a mystic who shuts himself off from the common run of humanity, nor is symbolism his sole idiom. True, it is a major factor of his poetry, but that is not all. There is another, and perhaps a more important, aspect to his poetry, and that is his concern with the life that flows around him. The transmitting of private visions—and that is what most mystics have exclusively done—is not to him the sole mission of a poet's life, and like a man of the world, he turns to the realities of life to discover the truth of things. He faces them squarely and lovingly, for he knows that everything has a bearing on life and that life is the sublimest subject for the exercise of the poet's imagination.

And so the great struggle for independence was to him, as it was to Vallathol, a cause which demanded his very best faculties. The legendary movement launched under the banner of Gandhi, and Gandhi himself, were to him sources of unceasing inspiration. The pride in the heritage of India and of Kerala strengthened him in his fervour, and finally the attainment of independence dazed him with the immense vision of the possibilities before the nation. How profound and sincere his feelings on the national question were are well exemplified by poems like *Janmarksham Jayikkunnu* (Hail to Birthday) in *Navatidhi*, *Tadhagata* in *Suryakanti*, *Bharatendu* (The Moon of India) and *Vandanam Parayuka* (Offer our Obeisance) in *Odakkuzhal*.

These poems are not so many panegyrics or self-glorifications. That unbridled patriotism can culminate in blind

passions, and such poetry lapse into tautological eloquence, can be borne out by any number of odes composed by Malayali poets on the themes of Kerala and India. Kurup, on the other hand, is more restrained and not infrequently, critical too. He is clear in his mind about the great values which sustain a people, and when he finds any of it slighted, he is not averse to criticising the detractors. In none of his poems does he content himself with merely glorifying what has been. And if anywhere he glorifies the past, it is only with a view to contrasting it with the present. Poems like *Tirunavaya* (a place of great historical importance in Kerala) and *Azhimukhathekku* (Towards the Sea) evidence this approach admirably.

Poems with a nationalistic import indicate another phase in Kurup's career. The advent of independence necessitated a change in tone and content, and this he effected in a masterly way. First of all, the event of independence has to be viewed in its correct perspective. He ponders over its significance and the new circumstances it has brought in and discovers that more important than the event itself is the unity, a change of heart, a chastening of ourselves, that we have yet to realise. And secondly, though independence is a remarkable achievement of India, it should be viewed as a blessing to the whole of humanity. Thus on the eve of independence he prophesies:

> Tomorrow, fanned by this Liberty's wings
> the seven seas will, with raptures, swell;
> tomorrow, seeing this promise of Peace
> many lands will, their plumes of Hope
> raising and spreading, dance in joy—
> and the sight of this invisible might
> will the aggressor nations force
> shut their gaping cannon's mouths.
> Begone Diffidence, begone Anxiety;
> behold this banner glorying
> gilded with a new dawn's rays;
> may for ever meadows and fields,
> forests, villages, oceans, towns
> bloom to peace and prosperity
> under the wings of this beneficent flag!

And we know that subsequent events have, to some extent, confirmed that prophecy. The liberty of the land and its vast significance to the rest of the world are, according to him, the natural outcome of the cultural and ethical values on which the nation has its sheet-anchor. In contexts such as these, the poet becomes impassioned, but his patriotism does not blind him to the ultimate goal before humanity—a goal that he holds dearer than anything nationalistic—the universal brotherhood of man.

That was the next transition—from nationalism to internationalism. The canvas now before the poet is unbounded and he fills it with pictures of an international community. The later-day poems reveal that his allegiance first went forth to the East, and thence to the entire world. They reveal also that India's attainment of independence is not an end in itself, but only the first step leading to the realisation of the great objective of universal peace and fraternity. His concern for the Orient expressed in poems like *Bharata Sandesam* (The Message of India) and *Javayodu* (Ode to Java) is in fact only an aspect of his concern for the well-being of the whole of humanity.

3. *The Humanist in Kurup*

A certain contradiction would seem to emerge when we take all his poems on socio-political themes for simultaneous consideration. One would reasonably doubt how nationalism and the revolutionary concepts of communism can be reconciled. But in Kurup's view, all these ideologies which seem contradictory are so many manifestations of one and the same basic principle: love of mankind. From the days of his worship of beauty down to the present, in all his poems, the dominant note is his love for mankind. The fortunes of humanity and the even tenor of life have many times changed violently during the last few decades, and Kurup who seeks to correlate the significance of these changes with his concept of reverence for life had to compose in different idioms—in the idioms of patriotism and peace as well as of revolution. The soul of it all, the essence, has ever been the same: love of humankind; and the objective too has been the same: its happiness.

The reader can get the true impact of his poetry only when approached from such an angle. Only then will he be able to appreciate his role as a prophet of the times and his transcendence of all the dogmatic ideologies which drive humanity into opposing camps. His idiom and his tone may differ from time to time, but his theme is basically the same—the life of man. In his vision, life is one and indivisible, an organic whole. He may begin from the particular—the touching story of a poor man carried to his grave—but it takes him logically and naturally to the tragedy of life. In a state of muted grief Nature herself joins the funeral cortège—and here we have a delineation of human compassion which touches the very depths of the heart.

4. *The Climate of Science*

There are not many poets in Kerala who have meditated so deeply on the advancement of modern science, the changes it has brought about in man's ideas about himself and the Universe and the strange experiences it has vouchsafed for him. His poem *Nimisham* (The Moment) is an exploration into the nature of Time, into the nature of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. And he brings out with credible logic, and in the language of fine poetic imageries, the truth which both science and metaphysics have arrived at, that there is no duality in the Universe.

Indeed how flimsy each Moment in Time,
and yet when it fades, beating its wings,
the Universe itself is driven
forward at tremendous speed.
And each wing-beat, its echoes pealing
in each of the living in diverse ways,
progresses fast on Action's way,
climbing the stairs of Birth and Death
and joins the grand procession of Life
to prove its drum-beats, to mark its measure.

And he goes on to sing of the creative processes which go

on in the Universe. Subliminal in destruction is the will to creation:

> Maybe one day the orb of the sun
> which the vault of heavens illumes
> burns out: but then Creative Will
> will from its embers a new sun make;
> and life will burgeon again, again
> drawing from it its warmth and light.

What we see in Sankara Kurup today is the logic of science going hand in hand with imageries worthy of a rich aesthetic imagination.

The four parts of *Sahitya Koutukam*, referred to earlier, contain his early poems. The later ones are collected in *Surya Kanti* (The Sunflower) *Pujapushpam* (Flowers for Worship), *Chenkatirukal* (Red Rays), *Italukal* (Petals), *Navatidhi* (New Guest), *Ilam Chundukal* (Young Lips) *Nimisham* (The Moment), *Odakkuzhal* (Flute) *Muthukal* (Pearls), *Swatantryodayam* (Dawn of Freedom) and *Olappeepppi* (The Leaf Pipe). He has also translated the *Rubaiyat*, *Megha Sandesam* and *Gitanjali*.

CHAPTER XXI

CHANGAMPUZHA AND AFTER

1. *Edappally—Sorrows of a Lover*

The early thirties of this century saw the birth of a new kind of poetry, different almost from everything else written until that time. It was primarily romantic, but its tone was much different from that set by Asan, Ullur, Vallathol and Kurup. The pioneers of this movement were two young men to whom the quest after love seemed the exclusive business of life. They found admirable patterns for their volitions in the lyrics of Shelley and Keats, and inspiration came from their own experiences. There had never been any dearth for love-songs in Malayalam, but the new compositions were more interesting, for they were unorthodox and spontaneous and bore the stamp of their creators' earnestness and sincerity. There was in them not a trace of any inhibition, and this forthright discussion of private experiences was altogether a new feature. And there were also the clashes of the poets with the conventions of society, and their cries of despair and protestations.

Edappally Raghavan Pillai and Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, the pioneers of the new poetry, are among the most colourful personalities in Malayalam literature. Classmates and friends since boyhood, they appeared on the literary scene almost together. Their lives were romantic adventures, and their deaths dramatic and premature—Edappally committing suicide disappointed in a love-affair, and Changampuzha of pthisis. The latter lived a little longer, and his output was staggering.

The distinguishing feature of their poetry is the dominant note of despair and tragedy. The despair is born of the bitterness of life and their unrealised longings for love. Such an empirical trait is not so much in evidence in most other poets. In their earlier poems, they were more objective, and there was something formal also when they gave utterance to their dreams, but when their experiences became more

intense, they threw all conventions to the winds and expressed themselves without any reservations. Their dreams and frustrations impart to their productions the warmth and glow of sincerity.

The love that surges up in their young hearts, nautrally and with an overwhelming force, is baulked and wounded by the selfish and deceptive ways of the world, and being inordinately sensitive, they are embittered and cry out in agony. That they felt the harshness of it all is self-evident—Edappally proved it with his own life. Changampuzha was never swept off his feet, and though in the earlier poems we find him too given to despairing, the stand that he took subsequently was one of defiance. He took courage to challenge the norms of social morality, and that led him away in new directions.

There is an intimate bond between the private life and the poems of Edappally Raghavan Pillai. A meteor which blazed but a little while and extinguished itself in the prime of its brilliance, Edappally was a victim of unkind circumstances, social and moral. Born in extreme indigence, he had to fall upon the mercies of well-wishers for his schooling, which he could not carry out even up to the High School stage. The days of his youth were spent in misery as, being timid by temperament, he could not fix upon a career to earn the material needs of life. And then came the romantic entanglement in which he was jilted, and the tragic suicide. The echoes of all these tribulations are heard in his outpourings.

The productive period of his life was a bare eight years. The poems composed during this time were published first in periodicals and subsequently collected in *Tusharaharam* (Garland of Dewdrops), *Hridaya Smitam* (Smile of the Heart) and *Nava Sourabham* (The New Fragrance). The collection *Maninadam* (The Knell) is posthumous.

We have said that the dominant note of his poetry is the despair with life and the agonies born of the infliction of malevolent forces upon his sensitive heart. There is in all his works the refrain that the past was the better part of life, that the present is unendurably miserable and death is far preferable to dragging on a woe-ridden existence. Thus in his early poem *Kattarinte Karachil* (Lament of the Wild

River), which is an allegory on the poet's own life, we have lines to the following effect:

> The dawns of my life have ceased to be:
> no more anew will they break for me.

But he had his days which brimmed with the light of love, and on them could he dwell, chewing the cud of happy memories. *Jnangal* (We) is such a poem in which he seeks to console his disconsolate heart by recreating those old memories.

But that is a thing of the past and dense blankets of dark forebodings have begun to descend on him. Nothing can now allay this agony, there is only one redemption, and that is death. Death-wish is the burden of a good many of his poems:

> What else indeed could I do?
> In none of the books I've read to date
> Could I find these three syllables—
> "Happiness".—*Jivitam* (Life).

> Weeping must this bud which bloomed
> Spend its days until it fades
> —*Hrudayalapam* (Lament of the Heart)

> When will I, this shade of grief,
> Cease to wander the wastes
> Of this world's ridicules?
> —*Sandesam* (The Message)

> O Death, when I think of thy name
> Why should my heart tremble so?
> For me, sinking in sorrow's depths,
> Who else, save thee, could bring solace?
> —*Nirasa* (Despair)

The most touching of all his poems, however, is *Maninadam* (The Knell) written on the eve of his suicide. He says that he is a misfit in this world of deceits, masks and revels angling

for innocent souls. It is the farewell of an idealist frustrated in all his efforts to live, and resolved to die. There is no complex thought-process in his poems, nor any philosophy except perhaps the deceptive nature of love and a pronounced death-wish.

2. *Changampuzha—Revolt of a Lover*

But the field covered by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai is wider and much more complex. The productive period of his life too was short—he died at thirty-four—but he could produce within that brief span an incredibly large volume of poetry and other writings. As in the case of his friend, Edappally, the link between his personal life and his poetry is very intimate. They progress together and every vicissitude in life produces a corresponding vicissitude in his poetry. It can be said that his poems are so many statements on his experiences of life. The early productions leave the impression that his experiences were far too many and intense for one so young in age. The contradictions of the world obsess him even in his teens, and he shows a greater predilection for the darker sides of life than for the sunny. In *Bashpanjali* (Tear Offerings), an early collection, we have the following:

> Unblessed I am, the sights I saw
> were all mantled in agony;
> all the sounds that regaled me
> were the wailings of pity;
> and all that hit my burning soul
> were sighs so hot and despairing.

Again, he is all complaint for the cruelties and insincerities of the world:

> A sincere heart in an insincere world
> is the reason of my failure—

lines of his which became famous even when they were written. And he too is obsessed with the death-wish:

Prepare my death-bed, dear friends,
in an emerald grove of leaves;
forbear a while, I'm coming straight,
let me to the world just one word say.

But that was only a passing phase in his career. He was never carried away by his emotions. He had much more than Edappally to hope and live for. The frustrations in love of which he sings since early in his adolescence were never so grave, one would think, as to compel him go his predecessor's way.

The characteristics of Changampuzha's poetry are such that there is nothing surprising about its immense popularity. The words are the simplest and choicest, the verse is sheer melody, and the visions of love it conjures up are exceedingly tantalising. His is the most musical poetry ever composed in Kerala. It is not merely the music of words, but something miraculous which swells up from his inmost being. The harmony of words is at best only an adjunct to that intrinsic music of his being.

The public, the young in particular, were enraptured by that music of love. Here is no tendency to philosophise, nor any emotion which could not stir responsive echoes. The thoughts are simple and transparent, and emotions, direct and easy to appreciate. Changampuzha is not given to any profound meditations, the even flow of the limpid verse is scarce obstructed by anything unintelligible. And to facilitate the ebb and flow of his outpourings he chose the mellifluent folk metres. When these metres, long neglected and frowned upon by elder poets, were given flesh and blood by his enchanting style and tantalising visions, the public needed nothing more to go into raptures over him.

Ramanan, a pastoral drama in verse, is the happiest instance of all the aforesaid traits in his poetry. When in addition Changampuzha could fix upon a tragic tale—which is of immense interest to Kerala—the work gained a greater significance and poignancy. The tale is that tragic love which drove Edappally to his doom, and Changampuzha, a bosom friend of the deceased, could feel the full impact of the tragedy in his being. It was, therefore, not merely just a theme for

poetry, but a cause of inescapable urgency about which he must sing. True, he throws all restraint to the winds and bursts forth in passionate declamations, but that, as it turned out, only added to the cumulative effect of the whole.

Ramanan is a pastoral elegiac drama conceived more or less on the lines of Spenser's *The Shepheard's Calendar* and Milton's *Lycidas*. But the conception of the whole is characteristically Changampuzha's, and the atmosphere that of Kerala. The treatment is in a romantic vein, but there is one feature in it which marks it out from similar compositions: it involves a social question also, the question of the high and the low in society. The sole obstacle that stands in the way of Ramanan's happiness and leads him ultimately to his doom is the wide gulf that separated him from his beloved in respect of wealth and social standing. That is a question that the poet needs must discuss, and he does so in the harshest possible terms. The indictments he levels against social inequalities and hollow vanities often border on the immoderate, but that again could only add to the fascination it holds for the public. The minstrel of love reveals himself as a critic of society also.

The revolutionary zest thus expressed in *Ramanan* was accentuated in his later poems. *Raktapushpangal* (Crimson Flowers) illustrates the development of this quality, and in this work he appears as an apostle of social revolution. It marks another phase in his career, and a good number of other poems produced during this period also have the same burden. *Vazhakkula* (A Bunch of Plantain Fruits), *Kodunkattu* (Storm), *Nava Varsha Nandi* (New Year Greetings), *Teeppori* (Sparks of Fire) and *Innathe Nila* (The Present State) are, for instance, exhortations to bring about the socialist revolution of the class-war type. *Vazhakkula* tells a touching tale: a poor Harijan raises a plantain in his yard, his children dance with joy when it flowers and the bunch matures, but the landlord sees to it that the fruit is sent to him. The grief of the children at being deprived of the fruit they had longed to eat and the cruelty of the landlord in so doing are portrayed in deep colours. And not being satisfied with telling the story, the poet expatiates on the cruelties of capitalism and proceeds to pronounce such insinuating warnings:

Will ever thy progeny rest content
without wreaking vengeance,
O hosts of oppressed humanity!

But with all such indictments and insinuations, it is a debatable point if Changampuzha was a poet of the revolution at all. It goes without saying that he could produce poetry in a revolutionary strain, but primarily he was a passionate romantic, happy with his dreams of love and despair. He had no theory or philosophy of revolution, nor even a direct apprehension of social realities. It would seem that the phase of revolutionary poetry was a passing one and that even during that phase, he was more concerned with questions of the heart.

There is no consistent philosophy in his poetry, nor any unity of purpose. Instead, we find symptoms of many complexes and contradictions. It is possible that these contradictions are the outcome of the clash of his romantic imagination which seeks to idealise things with the realities of society which also he cannot ignore. The collection *Spandikkunna Asthimadam* (Throbbing Sepulchre) exhibits best these contradictory tendencies. The one feature common to all the poems in this collection is an introspective lyrical imagination. Otherwise they are widely divergent in their themes. For instance, *Upasini* (A Woman's Adoration), *Ananda Lahari* (The Intoxication of Bliss) and *Aa Kugramathil* (In That Remote Village) remind one of the early *Bashpanjali* poems with their burden of tender love; *Spandikunna Asthimadam* (Throbbing Sepulchre), *Hrudayamulla Sarpam* (The Serpent with a Heart), *Maricha Swapnangal* (Dead Dreams) and *Oru Katha* (A Story) are tales of deception, faithlessness and ingratitude; and *Bhavatrayam* (The Three States), *Jivitam* (Life), *Pattinikkar* (The Starving Folk) and *Tengukalute Viddhitham* (The Idiocy of Coconut Trees) are exhortations to revolution. The second category of poems mentioned above are the passionate outpourings of a heart set on fire by the cruelties that love is capable of. They reveal the character of the poet and the sore points in him which send up those cries of agony. The impression one gains reading these poems is one of helplessness, disintegration and chaos. It would

seem that everything is out of joint. And how can a philosophy of life emerge from such a state? The poems which preach the gospel of class-war have many facets, and all of them discuss one aspect or other of the collective life of man. *Bhavatrayam* which is conceived in three parts is devoted to substantiating the view that there is neither prosperity nor social morality in Kerala. He ends up by urging his generation to raise the banner of revolt:

> Let us with Revolution's axe
> cut down the poison tree
> of capitalistic arrogance
> and lay out the beautiful grove
> of sempiternal equality!

Bhavatrayam is undoubtedly one of his best poems set in a revolutionary key, but the conclusion still remains inescapable that Changampuzha is neither at home with his call to arms nor even very sincere about his exhortations. The truth about him is better affirmed by his countless lyrics which show us a lover: heir to all the weaknesses of the flesh, hero of a thousand affairs, pleading for forgiveness like a guilty thing, driven again in the wild goose-chase of love, and weeping, protesting, and complaining by turns—that is the real Changampuzha who left an indelible impression on Malayalam poetry.

3. *Contemporary Poetry*

Whether poetry has registered any appreciable growth after Changampuzha is another popular controversy of the day. The influence he exerted on the younger generation was so profound that most of them took to imitating him. The view is therefore held that poetry has not put forth any new shoots, for imitation can seldom open new vistas. It has also been pointed out that apart from the style, the themes of much of the present day poetry are also taken from him—an excessive concern with matters of the heart, the despair with life and the call for revolution. There is thus some truth in the contention that a good proportion of contemporary

poetry is imitative of Changampuzha. But that does not mean that poetry has come to a standstill. At any rate, it has to be granted that the two broad channels along which Changampuzha diverted his talents—the channels of romanticism and revolution—are being continuously deepened and fed by his innumerable admirers.

The broad features of present-day poetry are that, first of all, the link between all poetic activity and the life of the masses has become much stronger than ever before, secondly, ideologies of Western poetry are being steadily assimilated and thirdly, the climate of modern science also has begun to pervade it. The tendency to idealise which is characteristic of romantic poetry is no longer there, and the preference once shown to themes involving the glorification of traditions and featuring the upper strata of society has been completely debunked. The view has come to stay that poetry should concern itself with the common people, people who have little or nothing, the oppressed and the exploited. To put it in different words, there has been a democratisation of poetry and the present-day poets, the younger generation especially, speak of life in terms of the masses and portray it realistically and without any of those trappings which go with idealisation.

The influx of the ideologies of Western poetry into Malayalam has been heavy. In Europe the two world wars brought about far-reaching changes in their outlook on life, and naturally, on their concept of poetry too. The untold miseries of the wars and the subsequent disintegration of the economic and social structure of the communities forced the poets to give up their habitual reveries and come to grips with the realities of life. Problems seldom deemed important, at any rate not as the business of the poet, loom large before him clamouring for immediate solution. He can no longer escape them, he has to think about them and suggest as far as it lies in his power, remedies for the ills of humanity. It is a tremendous task calling for the sustained application of his best faculties, and that, it would seem, is what he is doing, at least trying to do, in Europe today. The same, more or less, is the case with Malayali poets also, and on all accounts, with the poets of most other Indian languages. India has had no

direct experience of the wars, but the anxiety on this score is none the less intense. Besides, we have also had the struggle for freedom, the attendant political and social upheavals and our new-found status in the comity of nations. These developments have produced radical changes in all the Indian literatures, and Malayalam which has always been susceptible to exotic influences and receptive of new ideas irrespective of where they come from has availed itself of these new themes.

The influence of scientific developments is also discernible in contemporary poetry. When life itself is decoded in the formulae of Science, it is inevitable that Malayali poets too should fall in line. Theories like Evolution and Relativity, and events like the breaking-up of the atom and the launching of man-made satellites, have revolutionised man's ideas of himself and the Universe and shaken him out of his smugness and age-old beliefs. In common with most other literatures, these developments have had direct repercussions on Malayalam. The influence of modern Science over contemporary literature is comparable to that of *Vedanta* and theories like reincarnation over the classical literature of India.

4. *Some Major Poets*

We shall now refer to some of the major poets of the younger generation who belong, more or less, to the Changampuzha tradition and show the tendencies detailed above.

Kedamangalam Pappukkutty believes in the gospel of social revolution as envisaged in Marxian philosophy. He draws his themes from the poorer sections of the community and presents them realistically. His insight into the psychological probability of his tales is commendable. The close association he has had with the proletariat has stood him in good stead in presenting their lives convincingly.

His major work is *Kadathu Vanchi* (The Ferry Boat), a collection of short poems portraying lives consumed by poverty. His other collections which bear the impress of his revolutionary fervour are *Aval Parannu* (She Flew) and *Jnangal Chodikkum* (We Will Demand).

P. Bhaskaran's poetry reflects all that is characteristic of Changampuzha—the melody of the verse, a rich emotional

content, an undertone of sorrow and despair and a delightfully simple and dulcet style. But he has his distinctive traits also. For instance, while Changampuzha is more descriptive, Bhaskaran prefers to be suggestive. The repertoire of his vocabulory is not as rich as his forerunner's, nor is he so eloquent, but with a few suggestions he could evoke a whole climate of emotions. Nor does he plead for the reader's sympathy with profuse lamentations: he is more restrained than Changampuzha. A good instance of his method is the little poem *Orkkuka Vallappozhum* (Remember Me Sometime). It presents a bride leaving for her new house with her husband and at the railway platform where are gathered her friends and relations to bid her good-bye, the man who had once loved her has also come to have a last glimpse of her. Not a word escapes his lips, but a single glance of his conveys to her, more powerfully than all the eloquence that words are capable of, his parting message: "Remember me sometime." Here and there in his soliloquy are thrown a few suggestions about their past, and out of these one could reconstruct the whole story of their love. When that panorama of their past is presented against the background of their parting, the poem becomes overwhelmingly emotional. That is how Bhaskaran builds up his themes. He is not given to loud wailings.

It was as a composer of beautiful sonnets that M. P. Appan came into the limelight, but subsequently he switched over to social themes, influenced as he was by the popularity of Asan's later-day poems. Thus while some of his poems are underlined with the tenderness of love, some others breathe the spirit of revolt against social inequalities. He has indited some inspiring marching songs and some in a patriotic vein. The latter category of poems are not sentimental effusions in terms of patriotic platitudes, they are powerful appeals to the younger generation to rise and act.

Balikaaraamam (The Garden of the Fair) is Appan's major collection of romantic poems. These lyrics, some of which unique in many ways, are pitched in an erotic key. They bring out the many shades of the love-sentiment, experienced imaginatively, and are couched in simple and musical verse. In later poems, the sentiment is visualised in its nobler and

broader perspectives. He has brought out some poems on heroic subjects also. *Padathalavante Kathu* (The Commander's Letter), *Adarkkalathil* (In the Battlefield), and *Oru Bhadante Kritarthata* (A Soldier's Contentment) are memorable pieces in his collection *Sainikaganam* (Martial Songs). The series *Marching Songs* also concern the heroic. There is an undercurrent of cheer and optimism in all his works. He is also careful about the formal qualities of his verse.

There is an impersonal quality about Pala Narayanan Nair's poetry. Of course, he has composed in a subjective cast of mind also. For instance, his *Ragalapam* (Lament for Love) is said to have been inspired by his disappointment in love. And most of the poems in the collection *Bashparangam* (The Stage of Tears), portray touchingly his bitter experiences of army life, away from home and subjected to the rigours of military routines. But as a rule, his poems are more objective and centre round the facts of life. There is not much of a flight in them into the dizzy heights of imagination. Nor does he indulge in reveries. His forte is to sing of life in Kerala. He is concerned about the masses too, his collection *Manushyar* (Human Beings) and the poem *Nirdhanar* (The Poor) being successful efforts at portraying the poor.

By far the most important and famous among his works is the series *Keralam Valarunnu* (Kerala Grows). It is a long *kavya* with a broad-based philosophy. It presents the pageant of Kerala—its scenic grandeurs, its past and present, its hopes for the future, the customs and manners of its people, and their growth from day to day. The poet is taken up with what can be termed the cult of Kerala and he waxes eloquent over everything that bears its impress. The geographical features of the land, the arts and sciences that flourish here, the philosophic systems which sustain the people, memories of the great and the prowess and culture of the race—in short everything that is essentially Malayali is praised with pride and tenderness. The series has already run into five collections, and is still continuing.

Nalankal Krishna Pillai composes shorter poems in a romantic vein. Though he loves to picture the brighter sides of life, occasionally dark streaks are discernible. The more important among his collections are *Ragatarangam* (Waves

of Melody), *Soka Mudra* (Seal of Sorrow), and *Vasanta Kanti* (Spring Glory). His style on the whole is simple and pleasant.

Vailoppilli Sridhara Menon stands out from the good majority of contemporary poets with his uncommon talents and individual style. He is not eloquent but his very restraint has an impressive quality. He does not usually dwell on subjects of passing interest, he loves to portray those basic values of life which vicissitudes of time and place do not render obsolete. This concern with what is enduring is manifest even in poems which apparently are of topical interest only. Thus in his *Assam Panikkar* (The Assam Coolies) he paints in vivid colours the penury of the Kerala people during the war years, what impresses the reader most being not so much their destitution as their home-coming, and when *en route* they sing of the charms of Kerala, we get an insight into all those psychic forces which we describe as patriotic. Most of Vailoppilli's poems have this tender, yet irresistible, emotional appeal. It is not in the human community alone that he traces emotions which invest life with richness and sublimity, he does so with reference to animals also. *Sahyante Makan* (Son of the Sahyas), a poem on an elephant, is an admirable instance. An immense tusker arrayed for a festival is maddened by the sights and sounds of the scene and breaks away in a state of *musth* from the moorings which held it on to sanity and to man. The forces which obsess the animal's mind in that chaotic state are traced with a fine psychological insight. Every sight and sound in the festival reminds the elephant of its days of old when, in the primeval forests, it had an absolute sway over everything. And siezed with a wild desire to regain that freedom, it crushes everything under its invincible might. The climax is indeed tragic. It is shot by a soldier. The poet is touched to the quick, his sympathy rushes forth to the doomed creature, and the reader is overwhelmed with a sense of anger, pity and helplessness. Perhaps his most touching poem is *Mampazham* (The Mango Fruit), a tearful tribute to a mother's love. When the mango sapling in the courtyard put forth its first bunches of flowers, the child of the house breaks one of them. The mother is offended: how is it that he who should one day be scrambling for the ripe fruits be indulging now in such vandalism?

But the child is hurt, and he declares: "I am not coming to gather the mango fruits." His words, alas, come true, for he is carried away by death, and when the ripe fruits litter the beautiful courtyard, there they lie with none to pick them. The feelings of the disconsolate mother are described in such a way as to make one weep.

Vailoppilli is thus a romantic, but more than that, his poems breathe the spirit of being the products of a scientific age. There is nothing melodramatic about them, nothing tautological or unscientific, and that is a redeeming feature in contemporary poetry. His strength lies in amalgamating the facts of science with the poetic aspects of Kerala's culture. The atmosphere of most of his poems is pregnant with the life of the Malayalam country—the loveliness of its landscapes, its age-old customs, the colour of its pageants and the sounds of its festivals. The more important among Vailoppilli's poems are collected in *Kannikkoithu* (The First Harvest) *Srirekha* (Line of Grace), *Kudi Ozhippikkal* (The Eviction), and *Onappattukal* (Songs of Onam).

N. V. Krishna Varier believes that poetry should be a subject for constant experimentation. There was a plethora of melodramatic and sentimental poetry following Changampuzha and a sickening monotony. Varier set about the work of infusing a new vigour into contemporary poetry and opening up new vistas in respect of both form and content. And out of this purposeful endeavour were born the collections *Ninda Kavitakal* (Long Poems), *Kurekkute Ninda Kavitakal* (More of Long Poems), and *Kochu Thomman*. As the first two titles indicate, his poems are long and are meant to be a challenge to the lyrics and sonnets of the day which concentrate only on a single emotion or idea. He could also prove that an objective, narrative style could enhance the variety and comprehensiveness of poetry.

But Varier's narrative style is to a great extent different from both Asan's and Vallathol's. He concentrates more on the critical situations in his story and the hopes and anxieties of the characters than in describing the progress of events and sentiments as they are. There is also in him a tendency to interlard the real with the fanciful and create a magical atmosphere. His style shows an affinity with Wordsworth

and Coleridge; his *Tivandiyile Pattu* (Song in the Train) especially establishes his indebtedness to the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for its evocative magic. In poems like *Pazhaya Pattu* (The Old Song), *Engineer* and *Anakkaran* (The Mahout) too, the real is commixed with the fanciful and the illusory. This device often leads to the incredible, but the charming qualities of his words and the easy flow of his narration assist the reader in effecting a willing suspension of disbelief. Questions of cause and effect hardly become compelling.

The theme of *Nannangadikal* (Burial Urns) would seem to be rather odd, considering that no Malayali poet has ever touched upon anything approximating to it as the subject of poetry. But Varier could successfully, through archaelogy, paint the story of human civilization, a lively procession, as it were, of history. And in *Alexis Punyavalan* (St. Alexis) he translates psychological phenomena into poetry.

Edasseri Govindan Nair, poet and dramatist, concentrates on the social questions of the day, particularly on the plight of the farmer and the labourer. More important to him than the fanciful ornamentations on poetry is its content of social realism. He is concerned about relating poetry to the life of the common people and conveying in a simple and lucid language the hopes and fears of the masses. *Puthan Kalvum Arivalum* (The New Pot and the Sickle), *Panimudakkal* (The Strike), *Chirikkunna Manushyan* (The Laughing Man) and *Karutha Chettichikal* (Dark Women of the Chetti Caste) are his major collections, the last-mentioned being, to some extent, experimental in regard to both form and theme.

It is difficult to draw a correct picture of the very latest developments in poetry. We can only say that the younger generation is out to democratise poetry, to speak only in the language of the common man.

Vayalar Rama Varma discusses mostly the social and economic problems of the day which call for solution. The poems in his collections, *Kontayum Punulum* (The Rosary and the Sacred Thread), *Padamudrakal* (Footprints), *Nadinte Nadam* (The Voice of the People), and *Mulankadu* (The Bamboo Thicket) highlight with much indignation the plight of the peasant and the labourer, the miseries of the common people, the governmental yoke which, according to him, represents

only the interests of the landlord and the capitalist, the clash between science and superstition, and the doings of clerics. There is not much of a philosophy in his poems, except perhaps his endorsement of the class-war ideology. It is a sentimental kind of poetry meant to exhort and inspire the poor.

O. N. V. Kurup has a fine melodic style which is in keeping with the innate qualities of the Malayalam language. There is something delightful about its simplicity and artless beauty. Like Vayalar Rama Varma, Kurup also chooses to sing of the common people with the deliberate intent of inspiring them in the class-struggle. The very titles of his collections—*Mattuvin Chattangale* (Change the Laws), *'Nte Punnara Arival* (My Darling Sickle), *Samarattinte Santatikal* (Children of the Struggle) and *Porutunna Soundaryam* (Warring Beauty) can be taken as indicative of their themes. The problems of the proletariat and the native charms of Kerala dominate his poems.

Olappamanna, Akkitham and O. M. Anujan are some of the other well-known names in contemporary poetry. Protest against the orthodoxies of the Nambutiri community, to which they all belong, is one of the dominant features of their poems. But it cannot be said that they have identified themselves with the ideologies of revolution. The more important among the collections of Olappamanna are *Vina*, *Kalpana* (The Command), *Ilathalam* (Cymbals), *Kulambadi* (Hoof-beats) and *Kilungunna Kayyamam* (The Jingling Manacles). *Chilluvatil* (The Glass Door) is O. M. Anujan's important work. It is an allegorical poem which proclaims the gospel of revolution. The partition that separates the haves in society from the oppressed classes and sustains them under the wings of law is, according to him, a glass door which will be shattered to smithereens when the latter unite.

Akkitham was, to begin with, a poet of revolutionary inclinations, but his latest poem, *Irupatam Nuttandinte Itihasam* (Epic of the Twentieth Century) is a testament of his aversion towards the high-handedness of the revolutionary. He tells us that he is a humanist and believes in all the values hallowed in human relationships. He has the ability to explore all the windings and turnings of the human psyche, and a good number of his works are coloured with the experiences of his own life. Most of his poems are collected in *Valakilukkam*

(The Jingling of Bangles), *Teenalangal* (Tongues of Flame,) *Viravadam* (The Boast) and *Pratikara Devata* (Goddess of Revenge). *Madhu Vidhu* (The Honeymoon) is a hymn to the glories of being young and in love.

G. Kumara Pillai is a lyricist. His *Aralippukkal* (Oleander Blooms) contains some tuneful lyrics rich in emotional quality. C. J. Mannummoodu has a lucid, easy style. The list would indeed be a long one if all the poets contributing at the present day are to be mentioned. The following, however, also deserve mention: Malayesia Ramakrishna Pillai, Thycaud Chandrasekharan Nair, Ayiroor C. Madhavan Pillai, M. S. Kumaran Nair, Iswara Varier and N. N. Kakkad. A good number of new names are added to the list every year. On the whole, there is feverish activity on the poetic front. But the criticism that contemporary Malayalam poetry has ceased to put forth any new shoots, caused maybe by the low standard of the quality of much of it that is published—which some critics deny—is not generally unheard.

CHAPTER XXII

PROSE LITERATURE

1. *The Essay*

The novel, the short story and the drama which constitute the large body and are the major forms of prose literature have already been referred to. It now remains to consider certain other forms such as the essay, literary criticism, biography, autobiography, travelogues, research works, histories, science literature etc., all of which have registered considerable growth.

We have stated in a previous chapter how, as the Chairman of the Text Book Committee of Travancore, Kerala Varma introduced the essay, and referred to its steady development for which the new journalism was a contributory factor. The rapid increase in the number of periodicals called for more and more writings in prose, and the essay, with its convenient form and thematic flexibility, supplied the need. It cannot be said that all these early productions were uniformly good; they suffered primarily from a lack of that subjective note which is the hallmark of the English essay. But there were some writers who could rise above the commonplace and the matter-of-fact and stabilise the claim of the essay as a major literary form. The earliest among these was Vengayil Kunjuraman Nayanar—popularly known by his pseudonym 'Kesari' —who had a delightful personal style. An undercurrent of humour runs through all his writings. Their sincerity and an individualistic quality reflect the author's personality. Achyuta Menon who edited the *Vidya Vinodini* was another writer with a felicitous style. His writings cannot possibly be called essays, for they are largely treatises on various branches of knowledge, but the elegance and the simplicity of his idiom become the best essayist. The two volumes of *Gadyamanjari* in which are collected some of his writings testify his individuality. R. Easwara Pillai seems to have been inspired by Bacon. The seven volumes of his *Chinta Santanam* (Offsprings of Thought) contain some excellent passages in a didac-

tic vein. Appan Thampuran was another writer of the older generation. His *Mangala Mala* series is concerned mostly with historical and cultural topics, but his simple and forceful style imparts to his writings the authenticity of the essay. Murkkothu Kumaran and K. Sukumaran are distinguished from the rest in that they could treat even trivial subjects with an individuality all their own and purvey, in the process, a good amount of collateral knowledge. While Kumaran would lavish his fancies on the crow and produce one of the best-known essays in Malayalam, Sukumaran would do the same for the owl and the squirrel, and achieve as much, if not more. C. V. Kunjuraman and P. K. Narayana Pillai also have written interesting essays on a variety of subjects, but the latter's writings are weighted with his immense erudition. M. Raja Raja Varma and K. R. Krishna Pillai have presented serious subjects in a popular style, but their essays are more informative than subjective.

The tradition in respect of the light essay initiated by 'Kesari' was continued by E. V. Krishna Pillai and M. R. Nair (Sanjayan), its foremost votaries and propagators. They were both humorists, and the most famous in Malayalam barring Kunchan Nambyar, and no topic of public interest which lent itself for a little fun escaped their eagle-eyes. E. V. Krishna Pillai, the senior of the two, was the first to come out with essays on contemporary themes. Interfused with a lot of humour and satire, they were extremely fascinating to the readers of those days. True, the passage of time has divested them of much of this charm, but the two volumes of *Chiriyum Chintayum* (Smiles and Meditations) in which we have a good selection will continue to be an asset to the literature of the essay. E. V. Krishna Pillai delights in exposing the foibles in human character, and as the title of the collection indicates, there is much in the volumes to laugh over and to think about.

Sanjayan's humour was more biting. He was something of a crusader who criticised the foibles that came to his notice from the pedestal of a social reformer. Like E. V. Krishna Pillai, he too based his writings on events of topical interest, and hence are not calculated to appeal to the succeeding generations as much as they did to his. But that would not

bedim his fame, his genius is too powerful to succumb to the passage of time. The like of him who waged a relentless war against humbugs of all kinds are indeed rare in Malayalam.

It cannot however be said that the essay, in the strict sense of the term, is registering satisfactory progress at the present time. There are not many writers of the calibre of say, Hazlitt, Stevenson or E. V. Lucas, who leave the full impress of their personality on their writings. Of course, there are quite a few who are making worth-while contributions, but as it is, it would be better to skip over individual names.

2. *Literary Criticism*

As with the essay, literary criticism also owes its origin to English literature and its development to journalism. The earliest writings, mostly reviews of contemporary publications, were of C. Achyuta Menon, the editor and essayist. But the first critic who took to it as a vocation calling for the highest equipment of scholarship and analytical imagination was A. R. Raja Raja Varma, the poet and grammarian already referred to. He concentrated more on assessing the intrinsic worth of well-known works than on tabulating the merits and shortcomings of contemporary publications. His introduction to Unnayi Varier's *Nalacharitam* is a comprehensive examination from various angles of this renowned Kathakali work. He was also the first to lay down principles of literary criticism. His *Sahitya Sahyam* and *Bhasha Bhushanam* which detail the basic principles of literary composition, in poetry as well as in prose, are to this day standard works on the subject.

P. K. Narayana Pillai, well-known by his sobriquet *Sahitya Panchananan* (Lion of Literature) developed further the school of criticism initiated by Raja Raja Varma. He wrote exhaustive studies of some of Kerala's major poets—Cherusseri, Ezhuttachan, Kunchan Nambyar and Unnayi Varier—on the line of similar studies in English. But he was true to the principles enunciated by Indian rhetoricians also. For instance, in the studies mentioned above, he has shown due consideration for norms like *vastu* (object), *riti* (treatment) and *rasa* ('flavour') which are upheld in Indian rhetorics. The strength

and the weakness of the poet, his relative importance in the wider context of literature and as to how far he bears out the tendencies of his times were his main consideration. While the earlier critics looked into the superficial decorations of poetry such as figures of speech and other formal qualities only, P. K. Narayan Pillai discussed the merits of the work as a whole, analysing it scientifically. His critical studies possess an unusual perfection.

Swadesabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai and C. Antappayi were P. K. Narayana Pillai's confrères in literary criticism. Ramakrishna Pillai was an editor, and his productions were mostly reviews of contemporary publications for the columns of his paper. He was often harsh and the flutter his writings used to create in literary circles was considerable. His approach was a corrective, and a bitter one at that, to Kerala Varma, the literary arbiter of the day who was generous with his praise for all the works submitted for his opinion. C. Anthappayi, on the other hand, was always balanced in his views, and he sought to evaluate Indian literature in terms of the literary canons evolved in the West. His studies like *Bhasha Nataka Parisodhana* (An Examination of the Malayalam Drama) exerted a beneficent influence on the literary world of half a century ago.

The critical writings of Appan Tampuran published in the monthly *Rasika Ranjini*, and of Vallathol in *Atma Poshini* also deserve mention. And of the critics of the next generation the contributions of D. Padmanabhan Unni and C. S. Nair are praiseworthy. The former's writings, mostly appreciations, have been brought together in the volume *Mandana Manjari*.

When Malayalam literature liberated itself from the rigidity of formal classicism and moved away in new directions, it became inevitable that new standards of criticism also should be laid down. The pioneer who viewed the whole question from a fresh perspective and showed the way for others was A. Balakrishna Pillai, the able guide who introduced the younger writers to European fiction. As with poetry, the novel and the short story, he introduced new methods in respect of criticism also. The exotic standards served a twofold purpose—to instil a new vigour into critical activity and to guide the course of creative writing. His own output relates mainly to

what was then called "Progressive Literature" which emphasised the sociological significance of creative writing. This school upheld the view that literature should actively assist the progress of society and, in turn, progress with society. It may be interesting to note that this was a popular literary issue in Kerala much before the conference of the "Progressive Writers" at Lucknow in 1936. The pace and intensity of the new movement was accelerated by A. Balakrishna Pillai in his dual capacity of journalist and man of letters. It was largely through the introductions which he wrote for some major works of the younger generation that he voiced his views on the new literature. Important among such critical studies are his introductions to *Kadathu Vanchi* of Kedamangalam Pappukkutty, *Nimisham* of G. Sankara Kurup, *Spandikkunna Asthimatam* of Changampuzha and *Maninadam* of Edappally. In all these studies, we find an effort to correlate the tendencies in Malayalam poetry with those of Western literatures and indicate the path for its further development.

Of the present day critics of the progressive school Prof. Joseph Mundasseri holds a pre-eminent position. An attempt to relate the traditional norms of criticism with contemporary tendencies in Western literatures is discernible in his writings. He believes that creative writings of any commendable excellence originate from the depths of experience only and that a subject becomes worthy of literary treatment only when the author's experiences have a bearing on society. In the light of this standard, it would naturally follow that a good proportion of Malayalam literature, and for that matter a good volume of Indian literature too, does not deserve to be included in the category of literature. There are, however, exceptions. Though Kalidasa, Unnayi Varier and Kumaran Asan do not seem to have taken their tone from society, certain other traits of enduring excellence entitle their works to be remembered as the best literature. He approves of the new movements and is all encouragement for "Progressive Writers" like Takazhi, Kesavadev, Pottekkat, Basheer and Changampuzha. In fact, he is the most important critic of the day who has lent unstinted support for "Progressive Literature". Among his well-known studies are *Mattoli* (Echo), *Antareeksham* (Atmosphere) and *Manadandam* (Standard),

all of which are critical evaluations of some of the major works of Asan, Vallathol and Ullur.

In the last mentioned work and also in *Rupabhadrata* (The Concept of Form) and *Prayanam* (The Sojourn) we have a clear picture of Mundasseri's philosophy of criticism. The series *Vayanasalayil* (In the Reading Room) contains his reviews of individual works.

There is also a Marxist school of literary criticism which seeks to provide a new turn to creative writing. The major writers of this school are K. Damodaran, M. S. Devadas and Achyuta Kurup. The studies of Kuttippuzha Krishna Pillai which too are based on Marxian ideologies are thorough and comprehensive.

It would seem then that the ramification of criticism into different directions is governed to a great extent by extra-literary ideologies. But there are some noted critics who refuse to fall in line with any given ideology and evaluate a given work with reference to its more basic and lasting qualities only. They show equal regard for the norms of the classicists and progressives and have the courage to form their own opinions and express them without any reservation.

By far the most important name among these independents, and a master with a personality, is Kuttikrishna Marar, author of such masterly studies as *Rajankanam* (The Royal Threshold), *Kaivilakku* (The Hand Lamp) and *Sahitya Sallapam* (Literary Pleasantries). He has his anchor in what may be called the permanent values of literature, and he evaluates a work without reference to parties, cliques and the fashions of the day. He has that remarkable power of analysing a work or a movement with insight and arriving at original and independent conclusions.

Vadakkumkur Raja Raja Varma is a scholar and a classicist, and naturally enough, his writings are based on classical theories. He believes implicitly in the infallibility of conclusions arrived at by the application of those standards.

Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair is reputed for the sweep of his vision and the soundness of his ideas. His tracts on the works of C. V. Raman Pillai are deemed authoritative. *Dhanyavadam* (Obeisance) and *Kalayum Kalavum* (Art and Time) contain some outstanding essays on the fundamental principles of literature.

Another name to conjure with in the field of literary criticism is S. Guptan Nair. His main endeavour is to harmonise the modern tendencies in Western literatures with the finer elements in Oriental literatures and evolve new standards which will have universal applicability. A selection of his critical writings can be found in *Adhunika Sahityam* (Modern Literature) and *Samalochana* (Evaluations).

Dr. K. M. George has a profound imagination and a rare perspicacity. He does not hesitate to point out wherein a work has failed and how, but as a rule, his criticisms are constructive and embody suggestions for improvement. *Muntiricharu* (The Essence of the Vine), a collection of his early studies, shows him at his best in his critical methods.

Sukumar Azhicode, author of *Asante Sita-kavyam* (Asan's Sita) and *Ramananum Malayala Kavitayum* (*Ramanan* and Malayalam Poetry), is another eminent name in contemporary criticism. Though the aforesaid works deal specifically with a *khanda kavya* each of Asan and Changampuzha only, indirectly they cover the whole gamut of the works of the two poets.

Ullattil Govindankutti Nair, known popularly by his initials 'G. K. N.' concentrates mostly on reviewing contemporary publications. These reviews have earned for him the reputation of a sane and discerning critic. His essays on how to approach a piece of creative writing and how to assess its merits and shortcomings are eminently readable. A selection of these can be found in collections like *Sahitya Sancharam* (Travels Through Literature) and *Viswa Kanti* (The Glory of the World). Mention may also be made here of other critics like N. V. Krishna Varier, Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, P. Damodaran Pillai, Dr. S. K. Nair, P. A. Varier, M. Sridhara Menon, K. N. Ezhuthachan, C. J. Thomas, 'C. M. P.' and M. Krishnan Nair.

We may now refer to certain theoretical works on the nature of literature which, besides being comprehensive studies by themselves, are guides as well to literary criticism. *Bhasha Bhushanam* and *Sahitya Sahyam* of A. R. Raja Raja Varma are the first works in this category which have already been referred to. *Sahitya Sarvaswam* of Vadakkumkur, *Kavya Jivitavrithi* of Siromoni P. Krishnan Nair and *Sahitya Lochanam*

of P. M. Sankaran Nambyar are the next major attempts in this direction. The more recent works are biassed in favour of modern literature. *Sahitya Pravesika* of Suranad Kunjan Pillai is an excellent study of the basic principles of literary composition, in poetry as well as in prose. In Sardar K. M. Panicker's *Kavitatatwa Nirupanam* (Principles of Poetry) we have a general survey of principles of poetry, Western and Eastern. The author provides apt illustrations also. *Kavya Pidhika* of Prof. Joseph Mundasseri is a comprehensive study of modern, particularly 'progressive', literature. M. P. Paul has produced a good study on aesthetics in *Soundarya Nirikshanam*. In *Sahityam Entinu*? (Why Literature?) of K. Damodaran, we have a Marxian approach to the whole question. Dr. S. K. Nair's *Kalachintakal* (Thoughts on Art) contains some essays on diverse aspects of literature.

There are also some theoretical works on specific literary forms. M. P. Paul has written a book each on the novel and the short story. *Novel Prasthanangal* of A. Balakrishana Pillai is a helpful guide to students of European fiction. Of the works on drama, *Uyarunna Yavanika* (The Rising Curtain) of C. J. Thomas and *Navina Natakadarsam* (Ideals of the New Drama) of Mekkolla Parameswaran Pillai deserve particular mention. *Rupa Manjari* of A. Balakrishana Pillai is a scientific study of prose literature in its different forms.

3. *Literary Histories and Research Works*

The writing of literary histories is rather a later development and has yet to make much headway. The first history of Malayalam literature was written by P. Govinda Pillai in 1881, but until very recent times no concerted effort was made in this direction. *Kerala Bhasha Charitram* of R. Narayana Panicker, published in seven volumes, is a comparatively recent undertaking. Earlier P. Sankaran Nambyar produced a history, but that did not run into more than one edition. Narayana Panicker's work furnishes enough data about all the poets and writers of Kerala and discusses the contributions of the outstanding among them. Govinda Pillai's approach also was not different.

The five-volume *Kerala Sahitya Charitram* of Ullur S. Parames-

wara Iyer, brought out by the University of Travancore, is by far the most important and comprehensive study of the literary history of Kerala. It is not concerned with the language and literature of Malayalam alone, it covers Kerala's contribution to other literatures as well, to Sanskrit and Tamil especially, and the culture-pattern of Kerala. The *magnum opus* of the great poet, it is the fruit of thirty-five years of intensive study and research. Though he concentrates more on individual authors and their works rather than on the evolutionary processes which went on in literature, it is no doubt a fascinating work, characterised by comprehensive evaluations of individual authors and works, masterly expositions on specific literary topics, references to little-known works and an engaging style. It is undoubtedly an inexhaustible treasure-house to all those interested in gaining an insight into the literary, cultural and socio-political history of Kerala.

There have been some critical studies of certain literary epochs also. *Bhasha Sahitya Charitram* of Attur Krishna Pisharody deals with the origin and the early phases of Malayalam. *Kunchante Sesham* of Madasseri Madhava Varier is devoted to the literary epochs following Kunchan Nambyar. T. M. Chummar has brought out two studies, one on poetry and the other on prose. *Gadya Sahitya Charitram* is a comprehensive study of Malayalam prose from the earliest beginnings down to the present, but *Padya Sahitya Charitram* cannot be deemed so thorough. Another work which treats of a specific literary epoch is *Adhunika Malayala Sahityam* of P. K. Parameswaran Nair. It covers the literary figures, movements and major works from Ezhuthachan down to Kerala Varma and deals with the evolution of literature against the background of sociological tendencies.

Samskrita Sahitya Charitram of Vadakkumkoor Raja Raja Varma, published in three volumes, is another major work in this category. It deals with the contributions of Keralites to Sanskrit literature, and is an invaluable guide to students of Kerala's cultural history.

There is much enthusiasm now for research into the ancient history of Malayalam literature. The field is not altogether a new one, efforts at reconstructing the past epochs date back to *Bhasha Charitram* of P. Govinda Pillai. The earliest scholars

to take up research as a major vocation, however, were Appan Tampuran and Kunjikkuttan Tampuran. The latter was well-versed in the legendary lore of Kerala, and the papers he published in *Rasika Ranjini* conjointly with its editor Appan Tampuran throw much light on some of the dark corners of Kerala's literary and cultural history. Appan Tampuran's major contribution was the resuscitation of *Unnunili Sandesam* and *Lilatilakam*, both very important works to Malayalam, and their serialisation, the first in *Rasika Ranjini* and the second in *Mangalodayam*, another magazine he edited. He dug deep into the archives of the Trippunithura Palace and published many works like *Kamadahanam Champu* in his two journals. *Prachina Grandhamala*, a series of ancient works which he edited, contains many works published for the first time. His research studies have since been collected in the volumes of *Mangala Mala*.

Yet another magazine which rendered significant service to the cause of research was *Kavanodayam* edited by Kadathanad Udaya Varma Raja. The view first voiced by this magazine that *Krishna Gatha* was composed by Punam Nambutiri led to further research on the subject. Of the ancient works brought out through its pages are *Chandrotsavam*, *Bhasha Bharata Champu* and *Chellurnadhodayam*. The editorial notes which accompanied these publications are very comprehensive.

The Trivandrum Manuscripts Library is an institution which has rendered, and is rendering, yeoman service to the cause of literary research. It is not known if there are many institutions in India which house such a vast collection of ancient manuscripts. There is a special department attached to this institution to edit and publish the old manuscripts in Malayalam. Kolatheri Sankara Menon, a former head of this department, brought out a good number of such works with authoritative prefaces and notes. His studies of *Chandrotsavam*, *Bhasha Bharata Champu* and *Kodiyaviraham Champu* are well-known in literary and research circles.

The publications of the Madras University have also been significant. Dr. Chelanat Achyuta Menon's commentary on *Vatakkan Pattu* and his work *The Kali Cult of Kerala* deserve special mention.

However the most important name in the history of literary research in Kerala is Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer. The many volumes he brought out on a wide category of subjects are indeed monuments to his patience, scholarship and critical acumen. At the time he was working on his *magnum opus Kerala Sahitya Charitram*, he was publishing a series of tracts on his research studies also. These tracts, collected subsequently in the four volumes of *Vijnana Dipika* are indeed a treasure-house of ancient literature. As the head of the Trivandrum Manuscripts Library, he published *Ramacharitam*, *Kannassa Ramayanam* and *Girijakalyanam*, all for the first time.

Attur Krishna Pisharody also ranks high among the research scholars of Kerala. His are the first editions of *Unnunili Sandesam* and *Lilatilakam*. The importance of these editions can well be imagined when we note that subsequently they roused the widest enthusiasm among scholars, which led to many controversies and to the very voluminous writings on the same subjects.

The contributions of Vatakkumkur Raja Raja Varma also are noteworthy. Besides *Samskrita Sahitya Charitram*, he has produced many treatises on the little-known aspects of ancient literature. These are now available in the volumes of his *Sahitya Manjushika*.

Suranad Kunjan Pillai is an eminent scholar of the day who has done much to enhance the scope and standards of research studies. His editions of *Unnunili Sandesam* and *Lilatilakam* bear admirable witness to his erudition and his concern for research as a major literary vocation. It is an excellent study that he has carried out in respect of the authorship of *Lilatilakam*, its date and its importance as a whole to Malayalam literature. His *Unnunili Sandesam* is a thorough and dispassionate study of the ancient *kavya*. The exhaustive introduction and the learned commentary which this edition carries are indispensable for a correct understanding of ancient literature. Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai is another scholar who has specialised in *Unnunili Sandesam* and *Lilatilakam* on which he has produced a good amount of writing. His two major works are *Unnunili Sandesam—Charitradrishtiyilute* (*Unnunili Sandesam* from the Historical Perspective) and an edition of *Lilatilakam*. His other studies are collected in *Bhasha-*

yum Sahityavum Nuttandukalil (Language and Literature Through the Centuries).

The preface which Dr. P. K. Narayana Pillai wrote for *Padyaratnam* published by the Trivandrum Manuscripts Library is a masterly study of Manipravala literature. P. V. Krishnan Nair has recently brought out a critical edition of *Ramacharitam*. It is by far the most comprehensive and authoritative of all the editions of this ancient work.

There is an immense body of literature in the Manuscripts Library which has yet to see the light of day. Compared to what remians locked up in the archives, the publications so far made touch but a fringe of ancient literature. And there is much scope for further research into the published works, too.

Linguistics, like literary research, is another branch which is fast developing. There is still some controversy about the origin and evolution of Malayalam and the exact nature of its relationship to other languages of the Dravidian family. It is a subject which still calls for further probing. The view first expressed by A. R. Raja Raja Varma that Malayalam is an offshoot of Tamil has since been examined in detail by scholars like Attur, Ullur and Dr. Goda Varma, all of whom have expressed the view that the two are sister-languages which, springing from a common stock, branched off in separate directions. Attur and Ullur propound this theory in their histories of Malayalam literature and Dr. Goda Varma, in his *Kerala Bhasha Vijnaniyam*. Dr. K. M. George discusses the subject more scientifically in his thesis in English, —*Ramacaritam and the Study of Early Malayalam*. Some of the essays in his collection *Valarunna Kairali* also treat of the same question.

4. *Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias*

There are many dictionaries in Malayalam including Dr. Gundert's which has been referred to elsewhere. It has to be granted that the most scientifc work brought out up-to-date is Dr. Gundert's. The works of Bailey, Collins and other clerics also deserve mention, but none of them evince such insight into the philology or etymology of Malayalam words. *Sabdataravali* brought out in 1923 by Srikanteswaram Padma-

nabha Pillai is perhaps the most thorough of all the dictionaries available today. It is the work of a life-time. *Nava Yuga Nikhandu* of R. Narayana Panicker is another major work in this category. But it has to be said that a more exhaustive and scientific lexicon has yet to be brought out. A major linguistic endeavour now going on in Kerala is directed towards filling this gap—the preparation of a Malayalam Lexicon under the auspices of the Kerala University and the editorship of Suranad Kunjan Pillai. The work is progressing steadily, and in a few years' time Malayalam will have an authoritative and comprehensive lexicon.

There are no encyclopaedias in Malayalam. The *Vijanam* series, initiated by Mathew Kuzhivelil and the first two volumes of which have already been released, is directed to meeting this desideratum.

5. *Histories*

There is hardly any major work on history, of Kerala's especially. Different versions of an ancient work called *Keralolpathy* (The Origin of Kerala) have recently come to light, but these versions with their emphasis on legends cannot possibly be classed under the head of history. Some State Manuals and Gazetteers were brought out by the erstwhile governments of Travancore, Cochin and Madras, but all of them are in English, and none comprehensive. To Vaikom Pachu Muthatu is due the credit for publishing the first history in Malayalam. His *Tiruvitamkur Charitram* (A History of Travancore)—a brief one—published in 1868 follows the chronology of the rulers of the State, and is a commendable attempt as the first work of its kind. *The History of Cochin* brought out by K. P. Padmanabha Menon between 1912-14 was the next major contribution. Though the advent of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British is given the pride of place in the volume, it has to be said that the author has studied historical records very diligently, and the work on the whole is unique. The fourth volume of Malabar Gazetteer, translated by K. C. Manavikrama Raja, bears on the history of the Malabar territory.

The later works concern only certain periods and regions

and are often cursory. A few text-books for use in schools have also been written, but they are largely adaptations of accounts given in State Manuals. There are, however, a few exceptions which bear adequately on certain historical epochs. *Prachina Malayalam* (The Ancient Malayalam Country) of Chattambi Swamikal is one such work.

There are at present many writers who are carrying out extensive research into the history of Kerala. V. R. Parameswaran Pillai, author of *Puravritta Dipika* (Light upon Ancient Lore) has published many tracts on little-known historical subjects. Writers like him draw their data mainly from ancient inscriptions and archaeological remains. The efforts of P. A. Syed Mohammed also deserve mention. His works like *Charitra Keralam* (Kerala in History) and *Sancharikal Kanda Keralam* (Kerala as Seen by Travellers) provide glimpses of the land and its people during ancient and mediaeval times. T. K. Joseph, A. Balakrishna Pillai and Pazhayannur Rama Pisharody have also made substantial contributions to the writing of Kerala's history.

Keralam by E. M. Sankaran Nambutiripad, published in three volumes, is an original work, the first to be conceived from the Marxian angle.

The legends in currency all over Kerala throw much light upon ancient history. Their veracity cannot possibly be proved in the light of any recorded data, but it is evident that they contain some truth mixed up with much fiction. It would be interesting to compile these legends and find out how much truth they contain. *Aitihya Mala* (Garland of Legends) of Kottarathil Sankunni, published in eight volumes, would in this regard be invaluable indeed. Latent in these legends is much of Kerala's undeciphered history. There are some works on the history of India and of the world, but most of them are translations. *Lokalokam* (A Survey of the World) of M. Raja Raja Varma and *Loka Charitram* (History of the World) of K. P. Gopala Menon are the best works in this category.

6. *On Science, Economics, Politics*

Another branch of writing which has yet to develop in

Malayalam is Science Literature. There are of course some publications on the various sciences, but most of them are of recent date and are the outcome of Kerala's contacts with the West. Of the ancient works, mostly translations of and commentaries on treatises in Sanskrit, mention has already been made of *Kaudiliyam* and *Attaprakaras* and *Kramadipikas* which deal with histrionics. There were also some works on the martial arts. But none of them can possibly be called works on Science as we understand the term today. The works of the present day should deal with scientific subjects with precision and in an easy style. What is wanted is a popular science literature, free from the burden of too many technical terms and simple enough to be understood by the common reader. There are only very few writers who could write with simplicity and directness. In the last generation there were four of them—C. P. Achyuta Menon, K. R. Krishna Pillai, M. Raja Raja Varma and I. C. Chacko. Achyuta Menon's were the first essays on economics. Written for *Vidya Vinodini*, they have since been collected in his *Gadya Mala* (Garland of Prose Writings). M. Raja Raja Varma wrote many books and essays on the different branches of Modern Science. In his *Navina Sastra Pidhika* (Primer of Modern Science), the subjects are divided into three heads: Nature Study, Biology and Psychology, each section dealing with the growth of that particular Science since its early beginnings. His *Arthanirupanam* is a study of economic theories.

K. R. Krishna Pillai's *Paschatya Sastra Siddhantam* (Theories of Western Science) is based on Tyndall's *Belfast Addresses* and presents a fairly detailed account of the progress attained in Europe in respect of Natural Sciences. He shows a rare capacity to present even the abstract facts of Science in an engaging manner. His essay entitled *Vayumandalam* (The Atmosphere) is a good instance.

Foremost among the writers of today who could present scientific subjects in a popular style is Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair. He is as much a scientist well-versed in subjects like Zoology as a litterateur gifted with an abundant imagination. He has the necessary equipment for being an author of popular Science literature. In his anthologies like *Sastrathinte Gati* (The Progress of Science) and *Adhunika Sastram* (Modern

Science) we have many illuminating essays on biological and physical sciences. Life and the Universe, heredity, male and female etc. are some of the subjects dealt with in these works. His *Parinamam* (Evolution) and *Parnilokam* (The World of the Living) are regarded as excellent studies on those subjects.

Sciencinte Vikasam (The Development of Science) of M. C. Nambutiripad treats of Physical Sciences. M. Balarama Menon's *Paramanu Charitam* (The Story of the Atom) is an interesting exposition of atomic science, and in *Sastra Dipti* (The Light of Science) he tells us the enthralling tale of the atom developing into the Atom Bomb and the Hydrogen Bomb. The Travancore University has brought out some publications such as *Akasa Sancharam* (Travel by Air) by Mathew M. Kuzhivelil, *Vaidyuti Vilasam* (The Development of Electricity) by T. K. Joseph, *Manushodayam* (The Rise of Man) by P. Balakrishna Pillai and *Sisuhridayam* (The Mind of the Child) by Mekkolla Parameswaran Pillai.

P. K. Koru has made a comparative study of the Eastern and Western systems of astrology in his *Bala Jyotisham*. S. Parameswaran, a mathematician, has published many papers on a wide category of Science subjects. His *Adhunika Ganita Sastram* (Modern Mathematical Science) deals with the latest developments in Mathematical Science.

There have also been some publications on economics. *Dhana Sastra Tatvam*, (Principles of Economics) of P. N. Musad, published under the auspices of the Cochin Language Reforms Committee, is a fairly exhaustive treatment of economic theories. The works of K. Damodaran—*Nanaya Prasnam* (The Currency Question), *Dhana Sastra Tatvangal* (Principles of Economics) and *Dhana Tatva Pravesika* (Introduction to Economic Theory)—are Marxian in their approach.

There are not many works on sociological subjects. The one work which merits pointed mention is *Manushyan* (Man) by K. Damodaran. There are, however, a number of books on subjects like agriculture, co-operation, rural life, panchayats and the like. I. C. Chacko's writings on agriculture are eminently readable thanks to his genuine feeling for Science and a facile style which borders on the literary. *Karshakante Katabadhyata* (Rural Indebtedness) of Dr. P. J. Thomas, *Grama Kshemam* (Rural Welfare) of K. R. Ezhuthachan, *Panchayat-*

tukal (Panchayats) of R. Kesavan Nair, *Karshaka Sahayi* (The Farmer's Guide) of K. S. Nilakantam and *Paraspara Sahaya Prasthanam* (The Co-operative Movement) of C. Narayanan meet to some extent the requirements of books on rural life.

K. Damodaran, C. J. Thomas and a few others have written books on Socialism, Communism and other political philosophies. K. A. Damodara Menon's *Rashtra Vijnanam* (Politics) is a study of political systems on general lines. M. Prabha's *Bharana Ghatanakal* (Constitutions) provides information about the various systems of government in the world. *Nammute Bharana Ghatana* (Our Constitution) by Konniyur R. Narendranath is a good study of the Indian Constitution.

There are some books on subjects like sex, marriage and maternity. *Rati Samrajyam* (The Realm of Sex) of Nalappat Narayana Menon is justly a famous book on sexology. *Dampatya Premam* (Married Love) and *Matrutvam* (Maternity) of Helen Thomas also invite reference.

7. *Biographical Literature*

The writing of biographies was taken up as a major literary endeavour only recently. A beginning was made by Kerala Varma with *Mahacharita Sangraham* mentioned in an earlier chapter, but for many years there were no further additions. The next attempt, which was a planned one, was that of Thomas Paul, a publisher. A decision was taken at the Kottakkal Sahitya Parishat Sammelanam (1929) that a series of biographies on the lines of the English *Men of Letters* series should be written about the men of letters of Kerala. The first biographies to be brought out according to this decision were of Kunjikkuttan Tampuran, Vengayil Kurjiraman Nayanar, Otuvil Kunjikrishna Menon, Pantalathu Tampuran, Chandu Menon and Kumaran Asan, the writers being Murkkothu Kumaran, Kunnathu Janardana Menon, and A. D. Hari Sarma. *Oyyarathu Chandu Menon* by Murkkothu Kumaran excels the rest thanks to the biographer's personal association with the hero of his story. All these biographies carry extensive critical studies of the works of the concerned authors.

The *Men of Letters* series in English served as a pattern to other writers also. P. Anantan Pillai's *Kerala Panini* (A. R. Raja Raja Varma), M. R. Balakrishna Varier's *Kerala Varma Devan* and A. D. Hari Sarma's *K. C. Kesava Pillai* and *Kandathil Verghese Mappila* are all conceived on the lines of the English series. There are two books on the life and works of Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer, one under the joint authorship of A. D. Hari Sarma and A. C. Joseph, and the other by Vadakkumkur Raja Raja Varma. In the latter's work, greater space is devoted to a critical study of the poet's works. In fact, a common feature of many of the aforesaid works is that too much space is devoted to discussing the works of the poets and authors. The reason would seem to be that sufficient material about the facts of their lives is not available.

At the time when biography meant the biography of a man of letters, C. Narayana Pillai brought out the life of a political leader, Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai. It struck a new note in that political events of public interest were given greater importance and there was an element of passion in the narrative. The reference in it to well-known personalities and political developments gave rise to some controversies.

Among the other biographical works of note mention should be made of P. K. Parameswaran Nair's works, the major ones being *Sahitya Panchananan* (P. K. Narayana Pillai) and *C. V. Raman Pillai*, both well-known literary personalities. He has based his studies on recorded data as far as possible, and has endeavoured to trace the inner development of his heroes with the passage of time. He has produced a few more biographies: *Mahatma Gandhi*, *Voltaire*, *Napoleon and Josephine* and *Napoleonte Jivita Sayahnam* (The Last Days of Napoleon).

Of the biographies recently written *Raja Ravi Varma* and *Swarajyabhimani* (Velu Tampi—the Patriot) by N. Balakrishnan Nair and *Swadesabhimani* (on K. Ramakrishna Pillai, the editor exiled from Travancore) by K. Bhaskara Pillai are outstanding. The last-mentioned work is the fruit of much research and is based on recorded data. *Saktan Tampuran* by Puthezhathu Raman Menon and *T. K. Madhavan* by P. K. Madhavan also concern heroes of Kerala. The first work is on an eminent ruler of Cochin and the second on a public figure associated with freedom movement and social reform.

Reference has also to be made of the biographies of some of the spiritual leaders of Kerala: of *Chattambi Swamikal* by Parur Gopala Pillai and *Sri Narayana Guru* by Murkkothu Kumaran and K. Damodaran, especially. *Sri Nilakantateertha-pada Charitra Samuchayam*, a voluminous work jointly written by Pannisseri Nanu Pillai and S. N. Krishna Pillai is another outstanding work.

Lives of some of the prominent Christian divines and thinkers of Kerala have also been written. *Mar Louis Pazhaya-parambil* by I. C. Chacko, *Nidhirikkal Manikkathanar* by V. C. George and *Sadhu Kochunju* by Dr. K. M. George fall under this category. The last-mentioned work which concerns a saintly evangelist is conceived from a psychological angle.

There are not many autobiographies in Malayalam. The autobiography as a literary form was practically unknown until recently. The first person of some standing to write an account of his own life was Pachu Muthatu, the historian (1870). It is a matter-of-fact statement about the events of his life, and cannot possibly be described as an autobiography with a pronounced subjective note. *Vyazhavatta Smaranakal* (Memories of Twelve Years) of B. Kalyani Amma is the next, and indeed one of the best, autobiographies in Malayalam. The authoress presents in a touching manner the story of her life as the wife of the editor-patriot K. Ramakrishna Pillai who was exiled from Travancore. It is in fact an epic in prose. The other major works are *Jivita Smaranakal* (Realm of Memories) of P. K. Narayana Pillai, *Atma Katha* (Autobiography) of Sardar K. M. Panicker and *Jivita Samaram* (The Battle of Life) of C. Kesavan. R. Eswara Pillai, C. V. Kunhuraman, I. C. Chacko and K. C. Mammen Mappila also have written autobiographies, but none of them, except Eswara Pillai's work, is available in book-form.

Kazhinja Kaalam (Bygone Days) of K. P. Kesava Menon is the latest work in the field—a candid portrayal of an eventful life rich with a variety of experiences.

8. *Travelogues*

The travelogue is a growing branch in Malayalam Literature. *Vartamana Pustakam* (Book of News) of Parammakkil

Thoma Kathanar has been mentioned earlier. It tells the fascinating tale of two clerics of the Church visiting Rome *via* Brazil and Portugal and their return voyage after an audience with the Pope. The importance of the work lies not merely in its being a travelogue, but in the fact that it is the first work in prose written on the lines of Western literature.

There have not been many other works in this category until we come down to recent times. *Bilathi Visesham* (News of England) of K. P. Kesava Menon, written about four decades ago, is the first travelogue in modern literature. Subsequently a good number of books describing visits to Europe and other parts of the world came to be written in Malayalam. Two of the important works of an early date are *Jnan Kanda Europe* (The Europe I Saw) by Mrs. Kuttan Nair and *Jnan Kanda America* (The America I Saw) by Iralil Verghese. *Bhupradikshina Vrithantam* (News of Going Round the Earth) of N. J. Nair describes a trip round the globe.

A good many writers of Kerala have since undertaken extensive travels all over the world, with the result that Malayalam literature has been enriched with some fine travelogues. *Apalkkaramaya Yatra* (A Dangerous Travel) of Sardar K. M. Panicker describes vividly the dangers that beset the writer during a flight to America. S. K. Pottekkat, the novelist and short-story writer, is by far the most important writer of travelogues. He has travelled extensively—in India, Europe, Africa and Indonesia, and has written over a dozen books describing his journeys and the men and things he saw. Prof. Joseph Mundasseri has written charmingly and vividly about his travels in India, China and Europe. A tour of Japan and South-East Asia is the subject of K. C. Peter's interesting book *Japanum Tekku-Kizhakke Asyayum* (Japan and South East Asia). He has also written informative books about Africa and South America.

In his *Unarunna Utharendia* (The Awakening North India) N. V. Krishna Varier provides pleasant accounts of places of historical importance in North India and the developmental activities now going on in that part of the country.

With the ever-increasing interest Malayali writers are showing for the world outside, the scope of the travelogue is fast widening.

9 '*Pen-picture*'

The *tulika chitram* or the 'pen-picture' is a biographical form of literature, only it is far shorter than the biography and differs from it as a thumb-nail sketch does from a photographic portrait. There is also greater room in the 'pen-picture' for the display of the writer's artistic imagination—every word and sentence must evoke the peculiarities of the subject—than in the biography. There have not been many attempts in this form of biographical writing, but the few that have been made deserve notice. E. V. Krishna Pillai's was the first attempt, but his pictures turned out to be caricatures. C. Narayana Pillai's *Poya Talamura* (The Last Generation) contains his impressions of a few eminent public figures like C. V. Kunhuraman, K. C. Mammen Mappila, Pattom Thanu Pillai and Mannathu Padmanabhan. His approach reminds one of A. G. Gardiner. In the collection *Julian* by P. Damodaran Pillai, we get glimpses of C. V. Kunhuraman, Nandyarvittil Parameswaran Pillai, E. V. Krishna Pillai, Malloor Govinda Pillai and some others. Vakkom Abdul Khader has issued two collections: *Tulika-Chitrangal* (Pen-Pictures) and *Chitra Darsini* (A Picture Gallery). His subjects are the well-known writers and politicians of the present time. *Jnan Kanda Sahityakaranmar* (The Authors I have Seen) of Dr. S. K. Nair is a portrait-gallery of contemporary poets and writers. In *Vyaktimudrakal* (The Stamp of the Individual) of Sukumaran Pottekkat, we have glimpses of some eminent Indians: Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Sardar K. M. Panicker, C. Rajagopalachari, and others. V. V.'s *Ranga Mandapam* (The Stage) is another fine collection of thumb-nail sketches. Tatapuram Sukumaran is a specialist in this kind of writing. He has collected his sketches in two volumes—*Pathu Kavikal* (Ten Poets) and *Pathu Kathakaranmar* (Ten Story Writers).

Nammute Sahityakaranmar (Our Litterateurs) of Pallippattu Kunjukrishnan is a series of short biographical studies of contemporary men of letters. Published in ten volumes, it is an excellent addition to biographical literature.

CHAPTER XXIII

TRANSLATIONS

1. *Classics from Sanskrit*

The influence translations exert on any growing literature is bound to be considerable. In the case of Malayalam, the course of its evolution itself was conditioned by its contact with other literatures through translations. The close acquaintance with Sanskrit led to the translation and adaptation of many puranas and classics, a process which began quite early in its history and still continuing. The first major works to be produced in Malayalam are in fact adaptations from Sanskrit. *Ramacharitam*, the works of the Kannassans, *Krishna Gatha* and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata of Ezhuthachan have all drawn much from the original puranas, and though they have the ring of independent works, there are in all of them passages which are literal translations. We are not concerned here with such adaptations, we shall confine ourselves to translations only.

The *Bhagavad Gita* translated by one of the Kannassans is the oldest translation in Malayalam (15th century). It is a beautiful version, and one would doubt if there are still older versions of the *Gita* in any other Indian language. Subsequently, *Bhagavata*, *Brahmanda Purana* and the *Ramayana* of Valmiki also found their way into Malayalam. The authorship of the first two works cannot be ascertained with any certainty, but the Ramayana translation which borders on a free adaptation is known to be by Kottayam Kerala Varma.

To translate the puranas is a passion even with modern poets. The Mahabharata was translated word for word, metre for metre, by Kodungallur Kunjikkuttan Tampuran four decades ago. It is not known if such full translations exist in other Indian languages. Vallathol undertook a similar task—a close translation of Valmiki's Ramayana. He went still further: he brought out many of the eighteen puranas under the title *Purana Sanchika.* These translations are immensely readable thanks to the prose narra-

tions interspersed with verse, and the simple Dravidian metres.

The *magnum opus* among the translations of Vallathol is the *Rig Veda*. In no other Indian language do we have such a close and full translation. In magnitude it is comparable to Kunjikkuttan Tampuran's Mahabharata.

A good number of *kavyas* also have been translated from Sanskrit. The stimulus these translations gave to the development of Malayalam poetry is considerable, for a good volume of classical poetry produced in Kerala takes its form and themes from these translations. Among the earliest versions of *kavyas* are *Bhasha Ashtapadi* of Ramapurathu Varier, a fine rendering of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* and *Panchatantra* in *Kilippattu* style by Kunchan Nambyar. The widespread enthusiasm for poetry which characterised the Kerala Varma epoch accelerated further the pace of translations. A. R. Raja Raja Varma brought out *Megha Sandesa* and *Kumara Sambhava;* Kundur Narayana Menon, *Raghuvamsa;* and Kerala Varma, *Amaruka Sataka* and Nilakanta Dikshitar's *Anyapadesa Sataka*. *Magham*, *Naishadham* and *Kiratarjuniyam* were also brought out during this period. But none could gain the popularity of Raja Raja Varma's *Kumara Sambhavam* or Kundoor's *Raghuvamsam*.

Recently, there have been new translations of the works of Kalidasa. Sasthamangalam Ramakrishna Pillai brought out *Raghuvamsa* in *Kilippattu* style, and G. Sankara Kurup composed the *Meghachchaya* after *Megha Sandesa*. The latter translation is an improvement on earlier ones. And a few years ago, Sardar K. M. Panicker published a new version of *Kumara Sambhava*.

We have also to take note of two other translations, both of *mahakavyas*, by Vallathol. *Gathasapthasati*, a beautiful saga compiled by the poet Halan was translated under the title *Grama Soubhagyam*. The second work is *Bodhisatwapadana Kalpalata*, a Buddhist *kavya*.

Another major branch of classical literature which has been translated from Sanskrit is the drama. Kerala Varma's version of *Sakuntalam* was an epoch-making event in Malayalam. Soon enough, most of the important dramas in Sanskrit found their way into the language. Chathukkutty Mannadiar

translated *Janaki Parinayam* and *Uthara Rama Charitam*. The latter work, one of the finest of its kind, is written in chaste Malayalam, and is a pleasant contrast to the Sanskrit-ridden work of Kerala Varma. For this reason, Mannadiar's work could contribute more to the growth of Malayalam literature than even the pioneer's. *Sakuntalam* itself has been translated by at least a dozen others among whom are P. G. Rama Iyer, A. R. Raja Raja Varma, Attur, Cheruliyil Kunjunni Nambisan, Vallathol and Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair.

Raja Raja Varma's *Bhasha Sakuntalam* was in a way a protest against the highly Sanskritised version of Kerala Varma. It has a chaster idiom. He has also translated employing the same simple style *Malavikagnimitram*, *Charudattam* and *Swapna Vasavadattam*.

Vallathol also has made some translations from Bhasa, chief among which are *Urubhangam*, *Swapna Vasavadattam*, *Unmatha Raghavam* and *Abhisheka Natakam*.

Vikramorvasiyam of Kalidasa has been translated by many poets including Kunjikkuttan Tampuran, Kottarattil Sankunni and K. C. Kesava Pillai. Tampuran has translated *Ascharya Chudamani* also. Kumaran Asan's one major translation is *Prabodha Chandrodayam*.

2. *Translations from English—The Novel and the Short Story*

Modern Malayalam literature owes more for its development to English than to Sanskrit. The translations from English which contributed so much to this development fall under three main heads—of original works in English, of works in European literatures translated into English, and of works in Indian literatures such as Bengali translated into English. In this field again the pioneer was Kerala Varma who translated from its English version the Dutch novel *Akbar*. It was followed by translations of works like Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne*. Translations of Scott's novels were a common feature in the periodicals of those days. That was four decades ago.

There was soon enough a profusion of translations of novels in English, from Dickens, Hardy, Marie Corelli and several others. The preference at the present time, however,

is for continental fiction. The best works in all the European languages are available in English, and through this medium and the translations made therefrom, the writers and the reading public of Kerala get themselves acquainted with the latest trends in Western literature. The pioneer who introduced Kerala readers to the Continental novel was Nalappattu Narayana Menon, translator of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. *Pavangal*, as the Malayalam version is titled, was to his companions a revelation, for nothing like it was as yet written in or translated into Malayalam. The translation is literal—he was particular about preserving the tone of the original—and so frequently, the idiom tended to be something new and strange to Malayalam. But this strangeness about the idiom is more than compensated by the spirit of the original which it is able to preserve. Another outstanding translation was that of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* by K. P. Karunakara Menon. In this case also the rendering is literal. Both these novels exercised a profound influence over the reading public in Kerala; they were made to break off from the limited sphere of the English novel and get acquainted with the vast treasures of Continental literature. A similar effect was produced by A. Balakrishna Pillai's translation of the Maupassant story *Bel-Ami*: it brought the public closer to French literature generally, and particularly to the works of Maupassant.

A good number of the masterpieces in European fiction, in English, French, German and Russian, are now available in Malayalam. The following are some of the titles among many: Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *Resurrection*, and *Family Happiness;* Dostoevsky's *The Insulted and the Injured;* Maxim Gorky's *Mother;* Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter;* Leonald Frank's *Anna and Carel*; Hardy's *Tess;* George Orwell's *Animal Farm;* and Pearl Buck's *Good Earth.*

It cannot be said that all these translations are uniformly good, or that they are as much popular as original works in Malayalam. But it has to be granted that they have profoundly affected the development of Malayalam fiction. They have provided Kerala's writers some good patterns in respect of plot, characterisation and style.

The closest affinity that Malayalam literature bears to

Western literature is in the sphere of the novel and the short-story. A sizeable volume of European and American short stories is available in Malayalam, either as translations or as adaptations. The favourite authors are Tolstoi, Pushkin, Maupassant, Somerset Maugham and O. Henry. A. Balakrishna Pillai's *Nine French Stories*, N. V. Krishna Varier's *Seven German Stories* and A. Madhavan's *Chinese Tales* and *Two Stories from Pushkin* also deserve mention.

3. *Bengali and Hindi Novels*

The first Bengali novels to be translated into Malayalam were from their English versions. C. S. Subramanian Potti's translation of Bankim Chandra's *Durgesa Nandini* provided the impetus for undertaking further translations from Bengali. There are now more than one translation of *Visha Vriksha*, *The Will of Krishna Kantan* and *Kapala Kundala*, the more famous ones being by T. C. Kalyani Amma and V. Krishnan Tampi. Kunnathu Janardana Menon has brought out condensed versions of some Bengali novels. V. Unnikrishnan Nair's *Malati Mala*, Talappurattu Narayanan Nambi's *Madhavi Kankanam*, R. Narayana Panicker's *Anuradha*, and R. C. Sharma's *Sarayu Bala* are some of the other well-known translations from Bengali. The novels of Tagore—*The Wreck* and *Gora*—and about ten or so of Sarat Chandra's novels are also available in Malayalam.

Hindi novels too have begun to find their way into Malayalam. Prem Chand and Yashpal are the more popular authors. The increasing importance of Hindi and the interest that the Malayalis have been taking in the language long since accelerate considerably the output of such translations.

A good many volumes of short stories from Bengali, the stories of Tagore in particular, are also available. Puthezhathu Raman Menon's *Stories from Tagore* and Kunnathu Janardana Menon's *Katharamam* merit prominent reference in this connection.

4. *Dramas from the West*

It has been pointed out that modern dramatic forms in

Malayalam owe their origin mainly to contacts with English literature. A good number of plays from English have been translated since the last seven or eight decades and, they, in turn, have provided the pattern for the playwrights of Kerala. The first translator of the English drama was Dewan Bahadur A. Govinda Pillai; his *King Lear* and *Hamlet* are major works. These translations were not in any way outstanding, but as the first of their kind, they did attract some notice. The translation is in a sort of blank verse, something approximating to the style of the originals, but, as it turned out, his attempts did not inspire any following. *Kalahinidamanakam* of Kandathil Verghese Mappila, an adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* is written after the Sanskritic pattern, with dialogues in prose interspersed with quatrains. There was no further attempt for quite some time though the contacts which the Malayali playwrights kept up with the English drama were always steady. The break came about two decades ago when the younger generation of 'progressive' writers took to copying the techniques of Ibsen and other European masters. C. Narayana Pillai wrote *Mullakkal Bhavanam* after *Rosmersholm*, A. K. Gopala Pillai and A. Balakrishna Pillai conjointly translated *The Ghosts*, and E. M. Kovoor, *The Wild Duck*. T. N. Gopinathan Nair's *Janadrohi* is an adaptation of *The Enemy of the People*. Almost all the works of Ibsen are now available in Malayalam.

There is not as much zest about translating plays as there is about the novel and the short story. Nevertheless the influence of such masters as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Moliere and Shaw is clearly discernible in modern dramatic literature. Bengali and Hindi too have touched the Malayalam play. Dramas like Dwijendralal Roy's *Sita* and others have appeared in translation. So also Tagore's *Chitrangada* and *Natir Puja*.

5. *Poetry From other Languages*

There have not been many attempts at translating English poetry. Some of the shorter poems of Wordsworth and Tennyson were translated for periodicals in the early days, but they did not evoke much enthusiasm. The first major work to be translated in full is Milton's *Paradise Lost*, under the title

Parudisa Nashtam by G. Raman Menon. C. S. Subramanian Potti's *Saurabhanum Rashtravum*, a fine rendering of Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustom*, was another important work of the early days. Potti has also translated *Morte D' Arthur* of Tennyson. K. C. Kesava Pillai, Kunjikkuttan Tampuran and some others have also made some translations, but their output on the whole is not much. That there are not many translations of European poetry might seem paradoxical when we note that a major influence on modern Malayalam literature is that of Western forms. The chief reason for this paucity is that poetry is far more difficult to translate than the novel, the short story and the play.

The other important translations from English are *Sri Buddha Charitam*, a free rendering by Kumaran Asan of Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, *Sudhangada* of Changampuzha which is based on Tennyson's *Oenone*, and his *Divya Gitam*, a verse-translation of the Old Testament *Song of Songs*. There are at present some attempts at translating French and Russian poetry. The periodicals are often found to carry translations of poems from these languages, the translators usually being poets of the younger generation. Of Bengali poems, Tagore's works find a deliberate priority. *Gitanjali* is available in prose as well as in verse, G. Sankara Kurup's version in verse being the latest. To V. Unnikrishnan Nair is due the credit for bringing Bengali poetry to the notice of Malayalis. Vennikkulam Gopala Kurup's translation of *Tirukkural* from Tamil is a major work of recent times.

The *Rubaiyat* has many translations. *Rasika Rasayanam* of Sardar K. M. Panicker, *Vilasa Lahari* of G. Sankara Kurup, *Jivitolsavam* of M. P. Appan and *Madirolsavam*—it is a free adaptation—of Changampuzha are among the more important ones. Panicker's *Ina Pakshikal* (A Pair of Birds) is based on a famous Chinese classic. This is the first poem to be translated from Chinese into Malayalam.

CHAPTER XXIV

LITERARY AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

1. *Literary Organisations*

The foregoing is only a synoptic survey of what has been produced in Malayalam until 1956. It has not been found possible to do fuller justice to all the names referred to, nor even to refer to all the major names, and discuss the features of the various epochs and movements in greater detail. The attempt has only been to indicate in broad outlines the growth of Malayalam literature through the centuries.

It now remains to take note of the collective endeavours made from time to time to facilitate the growth of literature. The climate for creative writing is often provided by organisations and developments in the sphere of mass communications and these factors, as such, also merit mention in a literary history. There was not much of a need for collective efforts at the time when literature had practically no bearing on or meaning for the masses of common people. The patronage of kings and nobles acted more or less as the deciding factor in matters relating to literature and the arts and more often than not, they were the exculsive arbiters of tastes and fashions and the custodians of traditions. The position was not much different in Kerala too. It has, however, to be added that none of the princes and nobles was ever antagonistic to literary recreations and that even despots patronised and encouraged all pursuits after knowledge. Under these circumstances there was hardly any need for organised efforts on the part of litterateurs.

The advent of the British caused a steady decline in the power and prestige of the royal houses and the nobility. Literature and the arts which had looked up to them until then for patronage were now deprived of those sources, and inevitably there was an impasse. But that period was a short one, and the new circumstances ushered in as a result of contacts with the West soon effected a readjustment in social relationships. Education on Western lines awoke in the people

a sense of their own importance, and gradually the conviction grew strong in their minds that the functions so far exercised by the rulers could be taken over by themselves. A direct outcome of such a conviction manifested itself in the literary sphere: there arose a tendency among litterateurs to come together in the name of letters. The role played by journals in the purveying of literature and the fostering of a sense of fellowhip among poets and writers has already been referred to. The fellowship thus subconsciously nurtured took a definite shape in 1892 when, at Kottayam, a Kavi Samajam (Assembly of Poets) was organised. The Kavi Samajam soon developed into a more broad-based organisation called the Bhasha Poshini Sabha (Organisation for the Development of the Language) with the avowed object of developing Malayalam Literature on systematic lines. The annual conferences of this organisation were major events in those days, the venues of the more important ones being Trichur, Kozhikode (Calicut), Trivandrum and Kottayam. Literary competitions were conducted under the auspices of the Sabha and decisions taken and implemented for the furtherance of the cause of literature. The great assets of this organisation were the leadership of Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampuran and the executive ability of Kandathil Verghese Mappila. Soon a magazine called *Bhashaposhini* was started as the official organ of the Sabha. It served not only to weld the link between the writers, but to train up new talent also. On the whole it was a period of unprecedented enthusiasm for literature. The Sabha became defunct after a few years, but the magazine continued publication under the same name for some more years. There were other organisations also like Bharata Vilasam and Vidyabhivardhini, but none could render as much useful service as the Bhasha Poshini Sabha.

The willingness to organise and work collectively for the advancement of literature did not die with the Bhasha Poshini Sabha. What was wanted was leadership and when that was forthcoming, there rose another organisation—the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishat (The All-Kerala Literary Association). In 1928 a conference of the important litterateurs of Kerala met at Edappally, and the Parishat, which has ever

since been a forum for the Kerala writers and a beneficent influence on the growth of literature, came into being. Now it has its headquarters at Ernakulam, and its official organ, *Sahitya Parishat*, is a premier literary magazine of Kerala.

Another literary organisation called Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana (The Progressive Literary Organisation) came up in 1944. As its very name indicates, its objectives were to enrich "progressive literature" and fight reactionary tendencies and to pave thereby the path to an equalitarian society. The membership of this organisation was largely confined to writers of the younger generation who subscribed to its ideologies. This organisation is now practically defunct.

The annual conferences of these organisations are attended by delegates from most other linguistic regions. The obvious intention is to relate the literature of Kerala to those of other regions and to foster a sense of cultural unity. The Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Parishat held at Ernakulam in 1956 was thus a successful attempt at bringing about cultural integration.

2. *Art Institutions and Mass Contacts Media*

When we think of the arts of Kerala and the recognition they have gained among the other peoples of India and, to some extent, of the outside world, the first art-form to come to mind is Kathakali, and the first art-institution, the Kerala Kala Mandalam founded by the late Mahakavi Vallathol. The resuscitation of Kathakali from a state of total neglect was the noble aim that prompted the poet to found the institution and today, besides Kathakali, almost all the indigenous arts of Kerala including Tullal and Mohini Attam are taught here on scientific lines. All the prestige that these art-forms command today is the legacy of the great poet and his institution, and it is significant that Prime Minister Nehru himself presided over the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Kala Mandalam in 1956. It has since been taken over by the Government of Kerala, and an ambitious programme to develop it into a full-scale Arts Centre is being worked out.

The contributions made by All India Radio during the last few years for the development of Kerala's arts and litera-

ture also have to be taken note of. All the important writers and artists of Kerala are in some capacity or other associated with broadcasting. It is encouraging to note that all the major poets, playwrights, critics and writers of fiction are often brought to the mike for the presentation of their productions. The 'Poetry Festivals', 'Drama Festivals' and lectures arranged periodically at the Trivandrum and Kozhikode Stations serve to foster a new enthusiasm in the various branches of literature. All artistic talent is permitted full play, and the listeners have begun to evince a great enthusiasm for the radio.

A new form of literature designed to meet the needs of broadcasting is being steadily evolved. Not only is a new idiom in literature coming into vogue, a new way of presenting art-forms is also being built up.

The cinema in Malayalam has not risen to a standard commensurate with the cultural standards of the people. The history of the film is comparatively a short one. The latest productions are tolerably good, but the screen has yet to develop on healthy lines. Greater co-operation among producers, directors, writers and actors would seem to be necessary for better results in this sphere.

The Sahitya Akademi (Indian Academy of Letters) is giving Malayalam, in common with the other literatures of India, adequate encouragement for its development and popularisation. It has arranged and is carrying out a programme for the translation of well-known works in Malayalam into other regional languages and *vice versa*. A history of Malayalam literature (the original of the present work) and a bibliography have already been published. Prizes are being given to outstanding works and financial assistance to deserving men of letters.

Besides the Central Sahitya Akademi which stands for the whole of India, there is also the Kerala Sahitya Akademi which concentrates more specifically on the development of Malayalam literature. Many eminent writers of Kerala are members of this organisation and an ambitious programme touching all aspects of literary development is being worked out. There is also a Sangit Natak Akademi which concentrates on the development of music, drama and similar other art-forms.

Printing and publishing have registered vast improvements during the last few years. The book industry which was formerly run for the profit of individual publishers has now become a co-operative effort of the writers themselves. The Sahitya Pravartaka Sahakarana Sangham at Kottayam is a co-operative publishing concern of the writers themselves and the service it is rendering for the popularisation of literature in Kerala is indeed considerable. The leadership provided by this organisation has effected radical changes in publishing.

A well-organised library movement is another feature of the cultural life of Kerala. The progress this movement has registered in the course of the past few years is most encouraging. There were not a hundred libraries to begin with, but today the membership of the organisation runs nearly to three thousand. The State Government is providing generous grants for the purchase of books and for the working of the libraries. The increase in the number of libraries has vastly enlarged the readership and this, in turn, has acted as a major stimulus to creative writing. The phenomenal output of books during the last one decade is a direct outcome of this enthusiasm.

On the whole, the literary field in Kerala today is lively, and the prospect for the future, brighter than ever before.

APPENDIX

MALAYALAM ALPHABET

VOWELS:

അ	a	(as in un)	ആ	ā	(as in far)
ഇ	i	(as in pin)	ഈ	ī	(as in police)
ഉ	u	(as in full)	ഊ	ū	(as in rule)
ഋ	ṛ	(vocalised r)	ൠ	ṝ	(vocalised r lengthened)
ഌ	ḷ	(vocalised l)	ൡ	ḹ	(vocalised l lengthened)
എ	e	(as in head)	ഏ	ē	(as in tare)
ഐ	ai	(as in height)			
ഒ	o	(as in so)	ഓ	ō	(as in boar)
ഔ	au	(as in house)			

CONSONANTS:

ക	ka	(as in cut)	ഖ	kha	(ka aspirated)
ഗ	ga	(as in gallows)	ഘ	gha	(ga aspirated)
ങ	ṅa	(n͡g as in singing)			
ച	ca	(as in chapter)	ഛ	cha	(ca aspirated)
ജ	ja	(as in Japan)	ഝ	jha	(ja aspirated)
ഞ	ña	(cerebral n with middle of tongue)			
ട	ṭa	(cerebral ta)	ഠ	ṭha	(ṭa aspirated)
ഡ	ḍa	(cerebral da)	ഢ	ḍha	(ḍa aspirated)
ണ	ṇa	(cerebral na)			
ത	ta	(true dental)	ഥ	tha	(ta aspirated)
ദ	da	(true dental da)	ധ	dha	(da aspirated)
ന	na	(true dental na)			
പ	pa	(as in paternal)	ഫ	pha	(pa aspirated)
ബ	ba	(as in ball)	ഭ	bha	(ba aspirated)
മ	ma	(as in maternal)			
യ	ya	(as in yam)	ര	ra	(palatal r)
ല	la	(as in love)	വ	va	(as in variety)
ശ	śa	(palatal sh)	ഷ	ṣa	(cerebral sh)
സ	sa	(as in salute)	ഹ	ha	(as in harm)
ള	ḷa	(cerebral l)			
ഴ	ḻa	(cerebro-palatal)	റ	ṟa	(cerebral r)

INDEX

This index contains the names of the writers and the historical personages referred to in the text. It also contains titles of anonymous works, works of doubtful authorship, literary journals and classics whose authors are not mentioned. For all other works the reference is to the name of the author.

The alphabetical arrangement of names is on the basis of the surname or the last part of the name. Thus Vallathol Narayana Menon is given under Menon and Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Tampuran under Tampuran.

Principal references are indicated in heavy type.

Achan, Paliyathu 115
Adhyatma Ramayana **67-76**
Adigal, Ilango 14
Adigal, Venattu 15
Agnihotri, Mezhathol 17
Akananuru 14
Akkitham 254
Ali, Hyder 131,152
Alwar, Kulasekhara 15
Ambarishopakhyanam 80
Amma, Balamani **228-29**
Amma, B. Kalyani 274
Amma, T. C. Kalyani 281
Amma, Madhavi 229
Amma, Muthukulam Parvati 229
Amma, K. Saraswati 148
Anantapura Varnanam 30, 33
Anchutampuran Pattu 22
Antarjanam, Lalitambika 143
Antappayi, C. 169, 259
Anujan, O. M. 254
Anyapadesa Sataka 278
Appan, M. P. **249-50,** 283
Arnold, Mathew 283
Arnold, Sir Edwin 195, 283
Arnos, Father 83
Asan, Ayippilla 22
Asan, Kumaran **182-97**, 213, 215, 216, 217, 223, 224, 231, 239, 249, 252, 260, 261, 262, 272, 279, 283.
Asan, Paravur Kesavan 120
Asoka 1, 10
Atma Poshini 200, 259
Attaprakaras 30, 31-32, 79-80, 270
Ayyanarithanar 15
Azad, Abul Kalaam 276
Azhicode, Sukumar 262

Bacon, Francis 256
Bai, Rani Gouri Lakshmi 115
Bai, Rani Gouri Parvati 115
Bailey, Rev. Benjamin 116, 267
Balzac 133
Banayudham Champu 58
Basheer, Vaikom Muhammed 133, **136-38**, **145-46,** 161, 260
Bhagavatam 38, 41, 76, 77, 80
Bhagavatam Pattu 64
Bharata Gatha 64
Bhasa 279
Bhasha Poshini 120, 177, 285
Bhashavilasam 227
Bhasi, Toppil 162
Bhaskaran, P. 248-49
Bhattatiripad, M. P. 157
Bhattatiripad, V. T. Raman 157
Bhimji, Devji 119
Bhramara Sandesa 34
Brahmandapuranam 80
Brahmandapuranam Kilippattu 77
Bodheswaran 231
Bodhisatwapadana Kalpalata 278
Buck, Pearl S. 138, 280
Burnell, Dr. 10

Calcutta Review 118
Caldwell, Bishop 4
Caralman Natakam 149
Chacko, I. C. 270, 271, 274
Chaitanya, Sri Krishna 66
Chalangad, Jose 148
Chanakya Sutram 112
Chand, Prem 281
Chandra, Bankim 183, 281
Chandra, Sarat 281
Chandrika-Vidhi 108
Chandrotsavam 56, **60-62,** 265
Charlemagne, Emperor 149
Charudattam 279
Charvaka 231
Chataka Sandesa 34
Chattanar 14
Chekhov, Anton 133
Chellurnadhodayam 59, 264
Chenkuttuvan, Cheran 14
Cheriyachi Varnanam 29
Cherukad 162
Cheruvathoor, Joseph 148

Chilappatikaram 1, 6, 14
Chintaratnam 76
Chola, Rajendra 2
Chummar, T. M. 264
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 253
Collins 267
Corelli, Marie 156, 279

Dakshayagam 59
Damodaran, K. (Malabar) 158, 261, 263, 271, 272
Damodaran, K. (Mayyanad) 274
Dandi 172
Darikavadham Pattu 64
Devan 77
Devadas, M. S. 261
Devimahatmyam 80
Dickens, Charles 279
Dikshitar, Nilakanta 278
Dipika 120
Dostoevsky 280
Dutt, Michael Madhusudan 183

Ekadasi Mahatmyam 77
Ezhuthachan, K. N. 262
Ezhuthachan, K. R. 271
Ezhuthachan, Tunchathu Ramanujan (Tunchan) 11, 39, 40, **63-78,** 84, 86, 94, 102, 104, 192, 258, 264, 277

Gama, Vasco da 3, 81
Gandhi, Mahatma 209,234
Gardiner, A. G. 276
Garthwhite 119
Gatasaptasati 278
Genoa Natakam 149
George Dr. K. M. 20, 163, 262, 267
George, V. C. 274
Gita 39
Gita Govindam 86, 87, 278
Goldsmith, Oliver 183, 279
Gorki, Maxim 280
Gopalan 77
Govindankutty 148
Gundert, Dr. Herman 43, **116-17,** 119 267
Guru, Sri Narayana 182, 183

Halan 278
Hardy, Thomas 279, 280
Harinamakirtanam 76
Hawthorne 140
Hazlitt 258
Henry, O 281
Hugo, Victor 280

Ibsen, Henrik 133, 159, 160, 161, 282
Ikkavamma, Tottekkatt 151
Iyer, P. G. Rama 279
Iyer, Ullur S. Parameswara 19, 79, 162, 171, 182, **213-22,** 231, 232, 239, 261, **263-64,** 266, 267, 273

Jagannatha 66
Janaki Parinayam 150, 151, 279
Jayadeva 278
Joseph, A. C. 273
Joseph, T. K. 269, 271

Kabir 66
Kainikkara Brothers 156
Kakkad, N. N. 255
Kalidasa 67, 170, 260, 278, 279
Kaliyamardanam 59
Kalyana Pattu 42
Kamban 67
Kamsavadham 59
Kanakadasa 66, 67
Kannasans **38-41,** 65, 94, 277
Kapilar 14
Karunakaran 77
Karunesan 39
Kathanar, Parammakkal Thoma **84-85,** 275
Kautilya 79, 270
Kavana Kaumudi 177, 178, 200, 227
Kavanodayam 120, 265
Keats, John 183, 185, 239
Keralamitram 119
Kerala Patrika 119
Kerala Vilasam 116
Keralolpathy 268
Kesari 256
Kesavadas, Raja (Dewan Kesava Pillai) 127-29
Kesava Dev, P. 133, **135-36, 144-45,** 159, 163, 260
Kesavan, C. 274
Khader, Vakkom Abdul 276
Kiratarjuneeyam 173, 278
Kodiyaviraham Champu 54, 56, 265
Kokila Sandesa 34
Koru, P. K. 271
Koothattukulam, Mary John 229
Kovoor, E. M. 148, 161, 282
Kramadipika 31, 79, 270
Krishi Pattu 42, 46
Krishnalila 77
Kulasekhara 18
Kulavaniyar 14
Kumaran, Murkkothu 257, 272, 274
Kumarasambhavam 173, 278
Kunjukrishnan, Pallippattu 276
Kunjuraman, C. V. 257, 274, 276
Kuravar Pattu 42
Kurukkal, K. Narayana 132
Kurup, Achyuta 261
Kurup, Azhakathu Rama 152, 172
Kurup, Munshi Rama 172,
Kurup, Nagavalli R. S. 139, 148, 163

Kurup, G. Sankara 163, **232-38,** 239, 260, 278, 283
Kurup, O. N. V. 254
Kurup, Vennikkulam Gopala 228, 283
Kuttamathu, Mahakavi 162
Kuttikrishnan, P. C. (Uroob) 139, **147-48**
Kuzhivelil, Mathew 268, 271

Lakshmi Bai 120, 177
Lakshmidasa 18
Light of Asia 195
Lilatilakam 15, 19, 20, **24-28,** 33, 34, 55, 60, 266
Lilavati-Vidhi 108
Lucas, E. V. 258

Madhavan, A. 281
Madhavan, T. K. 273
Magham 173, 278
Mahabharata 1, 38, 39, 45, 56, 67, **68-76,** 88, 277, 278
Malavikagnimitram 279
Malayala Manorama 120, 150, 168, 169
Malayali 119
Malpan, Karyattil Ouseph 84, 85
Mangalodayam 177
Manimekalai 1, 14
Mannadiar, Chathukkutti 150, 278, 279
Mannummoodu, C. J. 255
Manorama Vijayam 150
Mappila, Kandathil Verghese 119, 120, 150, 282, 285
Mappila, Kattakkayathil Cheriyan 172
Mappila, K. C. Mammen 274, 276
Marar, Kuttikrishna 261
Mathavilasam 80
Mathen, George 119
Maugham, Somerset 281
Maupassant 133, 143, 280, 281
Megasthanes 1
Megha Sandesa 34, 35, 171, 238, 278
Men of Letters 272, 273
Menon, C. P. Achyuta 120, 270
Menon, T. C. Achyuta 152
Menon, M. Balarama 271
Menon, O. Chandu **122-25,** 133, 272
Menon, Dr. Chelanattu Achyuta 265
Menon, Chenkulathu, Kunjirama (M.R.K.C.) 119, 140
Menon, K. A. Damodara 272
Menon, K. P. Gopala 269
Menon, Ittirarissa 98
Menon, Kannan 132
Menon, Kappana Krishna 130
Menon, Karattu Achyuta 132
Menon, K. P. Karunakara 280
Menon, Kathullil Achyuta 168
Menon, K. P. Kesava 274, 275
Menon, Kizhakkeppattu Ramankutty 127
Menon, Kolatheri Sankara 265
Menon, Kundoor Narayana 174, 278
Menon, Kunnathu Janardana 272, 281
Menon, Nalappattu Narayana **223-25,** 229, 272, 280
Menon, Oduvil Kunjukrishna 140, 272
Menon, K. P. Padmanabha 268
Menon, Puthezhathu Raman 273, 281
Menon, G. Raman 283
Menon, M. Sridhara 262
Menon, Vallathol Gopala 225
Menon, Vallathol Narayana 60, 90, 172, 182, **198-212,** 213, 214, 216, 217, 220, 223, 225, 228, 231, 232, 234, 239, 252, 259, 261, 277, 278, 279, 285
Menon, Vailoppilli Sridhara **251-52**
Milton 244, 282
Mohammed, K. T. 161, 162
Mohammed, N. P. 148
Mohammed, P. A. Syed 269
Moliere 282
Moosu, Vayaskara 150
Moothatu, Vaikom Pachu 119, **268,** 274
Mundasseri, Prof. Joseph 148, **260-61,** 263, 275
Munder 118
Munro, Col. 115
Musad, P. N. 271

Naganandam 77
Nair, C. S. 259
Nair, M. R. (Sanjayan) 257
Nair, N. J. 275
Nair, Dr. S. K. 262, 263, 276
Nair, N. Balakrishnan 273
Nair Dr. K. Bhaskaran 261, 270-71
Nair, N. P. Chellappan 155-56
Nair, Edasseri Govindan 159, 253
Nair, T. N. Gopinathan 155, 156, 161, 163, 282
Nair, S. Guptan 262
Nair, R. Kesavan 272
Nair, M. Krishnan 262
Nair, P. V. Krishnan 163, 267
Nair, M. S. Kumaran 255
Nair, P. Kunhiraman **228-30**
Nair, Mrs. Kuttan 275
Nair, Kuttippurathu Kesavan **225-26,** 279
Nair, Pala Narayanan 250
Nair, P. K. Parameswaran 264, 273
Nair, Siromani P. Krishnan 262
Nair, Thycaud Chandrasekh aran 225
Nair, Ullattil Govindankutty (G.K.N.) 262

Nair, V. Unnikrishnan 225, 226, 281, 283
Nair, M. T. Vasudevan 139
Nair, P. K. Veeraraghavan 163
Nair, Vettur Raman 139, 148
Naishadham 173, 278
Nalanunni 101
Nalodayam 18
Nalopakhyanam 80
Nambi, Punnasseri 169
Nambi, Talappurathu Narayanan 281
Nambisan, Cheruliyil Kunjunni 279
Nambisan, T. Raman 130
Nambutiri, Cherusseri 11, **50-54,** 64, 65, 94, 258
Nambutiri, Kalladikkottu 87
Nambutiri, Kaplingattu 87
Nambutiri, Mazhamangalam 55, **57-59** 63
Nambutiri, Naduvathu Achan 151, 168, 169
Nambutiri, Poontanam 76, **77-78**
Nambutiri, Punam 55, **56-57,** 59, 60, 62, 63, 265
Namburtiris, Venmoni (Sr. & Jr.) **164-69,** 171
Nambutiripad, M. C. 271
Nambutiripad, Bhavatratan 132
Nambutiripad, Muthiringottu Bhavatratan 142, 143
Nambutiripad, E. M. Sankaran 269
Nambyar, Kunchan 60, **102-108,** 111, 124, 164, 167, 192, 257, 258, 264, 278
Nambyar, P. Sankaran 263
Nambyar, P. M. Sankaran 263
Napoleon 273
Napoleon Charitram 149
Narayanan, C. 272
Narayaniyam 59
Narendranath, Konniyur R. 272
Nasrani Dipika 119
Nayanar, Cheraman Perumal 15
Nayanar, Vengayil Kunhiraman 256, 272
Nayanar, Viranmandi 15
Nedungadi, Appu 122
Nedungadi, Kovunni 119
Nehru, Jawaharlal 276, 286
Nhattu Pattu 42
Nilakantam, K. S. 272
Niranam Poets (Kannassans) 22, **38-41**

Olappamanna 254
Omar Khayyam 227
Ona Pattu 42
Orwell, George 280

Padmanabhan, T 148
Padmanabhan, Mannathu 276
Pamman 148
Panan Pattu 42, 46
Panchatantram 192, 278
Panicker, V. C. Balakrishna **178-81,** 224
Panicker, Madhava **38-41**
Panicker, R. Narayana 263, 268, 281
Panicker, Rama **38-41**
Panicker, Sankara **38-41**
Panicker, Sardar K. M. **130-32,** 162, 225, **226-27,** 263, 274, 275, 276, 278, 283
Pappukkutty, Kedamangalam 248, 260
Parameswaran, S. 271
Paranar 14
Parappurathu 139
Patitruppattu 1, 6, 14
Paul, M. P. 263
Paul, Thomas 272
Paulinus, Father (Fr. Bartalomeo) 84
Payyannur Pattu 43
Pazhassi, Raja of 112, 115, 131
Peat, Rev. Joseph 116
Perumal Cheraman 3, 61
Peter, K. C. 275
Pillai, P. Anantan 273
Pillai, Ayiroor C. Madhavan (C.M.P.) 192
Pillai, A. Balakrishna 133, 143, 255, 161, 259, 260, 262, 263, 269, 280-82
Pillai, P. Balakrishna 271
Pillai, K. Bhaskara 273
Pillai, Changampuzha Krishna **239-46,** 247, 248, 249, 252, 260, 262, 283
Pillai, Changanasseri Parameswaran 273
Pillai, P. Damodaran 262, 276
Pillai, R. Easwara 256, 274
Pillai, Edappally Raghavan **239-42,** 243
Pillai, A. K. Gopala 61, 282
Pillai, N. Gopala 230, 231
Pillai, A. Govinda (Dewan Bahadur) 152, 263, 264, 282
Pillai, P. Govinda 119, 120
Pillai, Ilamkulam Kunjan 266
Pillai, Karoor Nilakanta 147, 163
Pillai, K. C. Kesava 150, 153, 171, 172, 174, 175, 279, 283
Pillai, M. G. Kesava 156
Pillai, C. Krishna 119
Pillai, E. V. Krishna 140, 142, 153, 155, 156, 257, 276
Pillai, K. R. Krishna 257, 270
Pillai, N. Krishna 160-61
Pillai, N. K. Krishna 132
Pillai, Kumara (Kainikkara) 156, 157, 262
Pillai, G. Kumara 255
Pillai, Kuttippuzha Krishna 261

Pillai, Malayesia Ramakrishna 255
Pillai, Malloor Govinda 276
Pillai, Mekkolla Parameswaran 263, 271
Pillai, Nalankal Krishna 250-51
Pillai, Nandyarvittil Parameswaran 276
Pillai, C. Narayana 161, 273, 276, 282
Pillai, P. K. Narayana (Sahitya-panchananan) 257, 258, 259, 273, 294
Pillai, Dr. P. K. Narayana 267
Pillai, Padmanabha (Kainikkara) 156
Pillai, Pannisseri Nanu 274
Pillai, V. R. Parameswaran 269
Pillai, Parur Gopala 274
Pillai, Pattom Thanu 276
Pillai, Pulimana Parameswaran 162
Pillai, C. V. Raman 119, **125-30,** 132, 133, **153-55,** 156, 261
Pillai, K. Ramakrishna 159, 163
Pillai, Sastamangalam Ramakrishna 278
Pillai, Swadesabhimani K. Ramakrishna 120, 121, 131, 259, 273, 274
Pillai, Suranad Kunjan 263, 266
Pillai, Thakazhi Sivasankara **133-35, 143-44,** 159, 260
Pillai, Tiruvattar Narayana 151,152
Pillai, T. K. Velu 132
Pisharody, Attur Krishna 20, 264, 266, 267 279
Pisharody, Pazhayannur Rama 269
Poduval, Ambady Narayana 130, 141
Poe, Edgar Allan 140
Pottekkatt, D. M. 148
Pottekkatt, S. K. 133, **138-39,** 146 260, 275
Pottekkatt, Sukumaran 276
Potti, C. S. Subramanian 176, 281, 283
Prabha, M. 272
Prabhakaran 17
Pulluvan Pattu 46
Purakkalli Pattu 47
Purananuru 14
Pushkin 280, 281

Radhakrishnan Dr. S. 276
Rafi, Ponjikkara 139, 148
Raghaviyam 108
Raghuvamsam 173, 278
Rajagopalachari, C. 276
Raja, Kadathanad Udaya Varma 265
Raja, K. C. Manavikrama 268
Raja, K. K. 230
Rajaratnavaliyam Champu 56, 58-59
Raja, Vettathu 87
Ramacharitam Pattu **19-22,** 23, 65, 67, 267, 277
Ramakatha Pattu 22, 23
Ramakrishna, Sri 183
Ramakrishnayya 5
Raman, Pallathu 225, 226
Ramanuja 66
Ramapanivada 108
Ramayana 1, 20, 22, 38, 39, 56, 80, 90, 162, 188, 190, 277
Rao, Dewan Madhava 117
Rasakrida 52
Rasikaranjini 120, 177, 259, 265
Rig Veda 278
Rosmersholm 161
Roy, Dwijendralal 282
Rubaiyat 227, 238, 283

Sahitiya Parishat 286
Saktibhadra 18
Sakuntalam 120, 127, 278, 279
Sankara, Sri (Sankaracharya) 17, 192
Sankunni, Kottarathil 150, 269, 279
Satyananda Kahalam 119
Sarma, A.D. Hari 272, 273
Sarma, R. C. 281
Scott, Sir Walter 122, 125, 126, 279
Seleucas 1
Setubandhanam Pattu 64
Shakespeare, William 151, 152, 155, 227
Shaw, Bernard 282
Shelley, P. B. 183, 185, 232, 239
Sheridan 153
Simon, K. V. 172
Sitaraghavam 108
Sivaratri Mahatmyam 39, 41, 77
Skandapuranam 77
Song of Songs 283
Sophocles 227
Spenser, Edmund 244
Sri Buddha Charitam 195
Sridhara 66
Stevenson 258
Sujananandini 120
Suka Sandesa 18, 34
Sukumaran, K. 141, 257
Sukumaran, Tatapuram 276
Surdas 66
Surendran, K 139
Surpanakhankam 80
Suryanarayanan 77
Swadesabhimani 121
Swamikal, Chattambi 269
Swapana vasavadattam 279
Syamantakam 59

Tagore, Rabindranath 183, 225, 231, 232, 233, 281, 282, 283
Tampan, Putiyakkal 98
Tampi, Irayimman 99, 102, 112, 113, 116
Tampi, V. Krishnan 162, 281
Tampi, Velu (Dalava) 81, 112, 115, 131, 156, 227, 273

Tampuran, Appan 130, 163, 257, 259, 265
Tampuran, Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi **117-19**, 120, 127, 150, **168-71,** 173, 213, 256, 259, 264, 272, 278 279, 285
Tampuran, Kilimanoor Vidwan Koyi 99, 100, 102, 113
Tampuran, Kottarakkara 87
Tampuran,, Kottayathu Kerala Verma 87, 88, **90-92,** 277
Tampuran, Kodungallur Kochunni 150, 151, 168, 169, 172
Tampuran, Kodungalloor Kunhikkuttan 168, 169, 174, 175, 265, 272, 277, 278, 279, 283
Tamprakkal, Azhuvancheri 84
Tenkailasanadhodayam 59
Tennyson, Lord Alfred 176, 183, 282, 283
Thomas, C. J. 161, 262, 263, 272
Thomas, Dr. P. J. 271
Thomas, Helen 272
Thottam, Mary John 228
Tikkoteeyan 163
Tippu Sultan 111, 115, 128, 129, 131
Tirunal, Aswati 98, 177
Tirunal, Maharaja Ayilyam 117, 118
Tirunal, Maharaja Kartika (Dharma Raja) 84, 92, 93, 98, 127
Tirunal, Maharaja Swati 98, 100, 112, 113, 115, 116
Tirunal, Maharaja Visakham 118
Tiruvalluvar 228
Tola 18, 32
Tolkkappiar 6
Tolstoi, Leo 280, 281
Tulasidas 66
Tumbi Pattu 42
Tukkaram 66, 67
Tuyilunarthu Pattu 44
Tyndall 270

Ulakudaya Perumal Pattu 22
Unni, D. Padmanabhan 259
Unnichirutevi Charitam 28
Unniyachi Charitam 28, 55
Unniyadi Charitam 55
Unnunili Sandesam 26, **34-37** 266
Uttararama Charitam 151, 279
Uttara Ramayanam 76

Vadakkan Pattu **47-50,** 174
Vaisika Tantram 26, **30-31**
Vararuchi 17
Varier, P. A. 262
Varier, M. R. Balakrishna 273
Varier, Chakrapani 152
Varier, Iswara 255
Varier, M. R. Krishna 225, 226
Varier, N. V. Krisha 252, 253, 262, 275, 281
Varier, Madasseri Madhava 264
Varier, Rama 142
Varier, Ramapurathu **108-11,** 278
Varier, Unnayi 90, **92-98,** 99, 102, 258, 260
Varkey, Muttathu 139, 148
Varkey, Ponkunnam 146, 159
Varma, Bhaskara Ravi 2, 32
Varma, Changanasseri Ravi 150
Varma, Dr. K. Goda 267
Varma, Kulasekhara 32
Varma, Maharaja Martanda 84, 100, 109, 110, 112, 125, 128, 131
Varma, Pantalam Kerala 172, 177, 272
Varma, A. R. Raja Raja 4, 150, **169-71,** 173, **175-76,** 182, 183, 188, 258, 262, 273, 278, 279
Varma, M. Raja Raja 176, 257, 269, 270
Varma, Rama 58
Varma, Sri Vira Rama 20
Varma, Vadakkumkur Raja Raja 172, 261, 262, 264, 266, 267, 273
Varma, Vayalar Rama 253-54
Vasudeva 18
Vedasaram 83
Vedantasaram 77
Velan Pattu 46
Venkitadasa 66
Venpamala 15
Verghese, Iralil 275
Vetalacharitam 77
Vicharippukar, Easwara Pillai 101, 116
Vidya Vilasini 120
Vidya Vinodini 120, 256
Vikramorvasiyam 279
Vishnusara 67
Vivekananda, Swami 183
Vivekanandan, G. 139
Vivekodayam 177, 183
'V. V.' 276

Wordsworth, William 252, 282
Wood, Mrs. Henry 279

Yakobu Natakam 149
Yashpal 281

Zamorin, Manaveda Raja 62, 87
Zamorin, Manavikrama Raja 62.

DEC 31 1968

A FEW OF THE ENGLISH PUBLICATIONS OF THE AKADEMI

History of Assamese Literature

By Dr Birinchi Kumar Barua

Cloth Rs 8.00 Paper Rs 6.00

History of Bengali Literature

By Dr Sukumar Sen

Second revised edition in press

History of Oriya Literature

By Dr Mayadhar Mansinha

Cloth Rs 8.00 Paper Rs 6.00

Contemporary Indian Literature

Sixteen scholars, each a recognized authority in his subject, have contributed to this volume. The writers give the background of each Indian language, a short account of the growth of its literature and a survey of the present trends.

Rs 4.50

Contemporary Indian Short Stories,

First series

A collection of contemporary Indian short stories depicting a cross-section of Indian literature of the present time.

Second edn. Rs 8.00

A *second series* of Indian short stories is now in press.

The National Bibliography of Indian Literature 1901–53

This comprehensive bibliography, covering more than half a century of literary achievement, is in four parts, of which the first comprising Assamese, Bengali, English and Gujarati, and the second Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri and Malayalam, have been published, each volume with a consolidated Index.
Every language section is divided into the following categories : General Works ; Philosophy and Religion ; Social Science ; Linguistics ; Arts ; Literature ; History, Biography and Travel ; and Miscellaneous. In transcribing names and titles the international system of transliteration is used, and the collation and annotation are in English.

Rs 50.00 per volume

Jacket printed by Reproduction Syndicate, Calcutta

It was a happy idea of the Sahitya Akademi to organise the publication of historical studies of the literatures of our various languages in India. One of the principal functions of the Sahitya Akademi is to encourage all these great languages of India and to bring them closer to each other. Their roots and inspiration have been much the same and the mental climate in which they have grown up has been similar. All of them have also faced the same type of impact from Western thought and influence. Even the languages of Southern India, with their different origins, have grown up in similar conditions. It may, therefore, be said that each of these great languages is not merely the language of a part of India, but is essentially a language of India, representing the thought and culture and development of this country in its manifold forms.

It may not be possible for many of us to have a direct acquaintance with the literatures of our various languages. But it is certainly desirable that every person of India who claims to be educated should know something about languages other than his own. He should be acquainted with the classics and the famous books written in those languages and thus imbibe into his being the broad and many-sided bases of India's culture.

In order to help in this process, the Sahitya Akademi has been bringing out translations of well-known books from each of our languages into others and is sponsoring these histories of Indian literatures. The Akademi is thus widening and deepening the basis of our cultural knowledge and making people realise the essential unity of India's thought and literary background.

Jawaharlal Nehru